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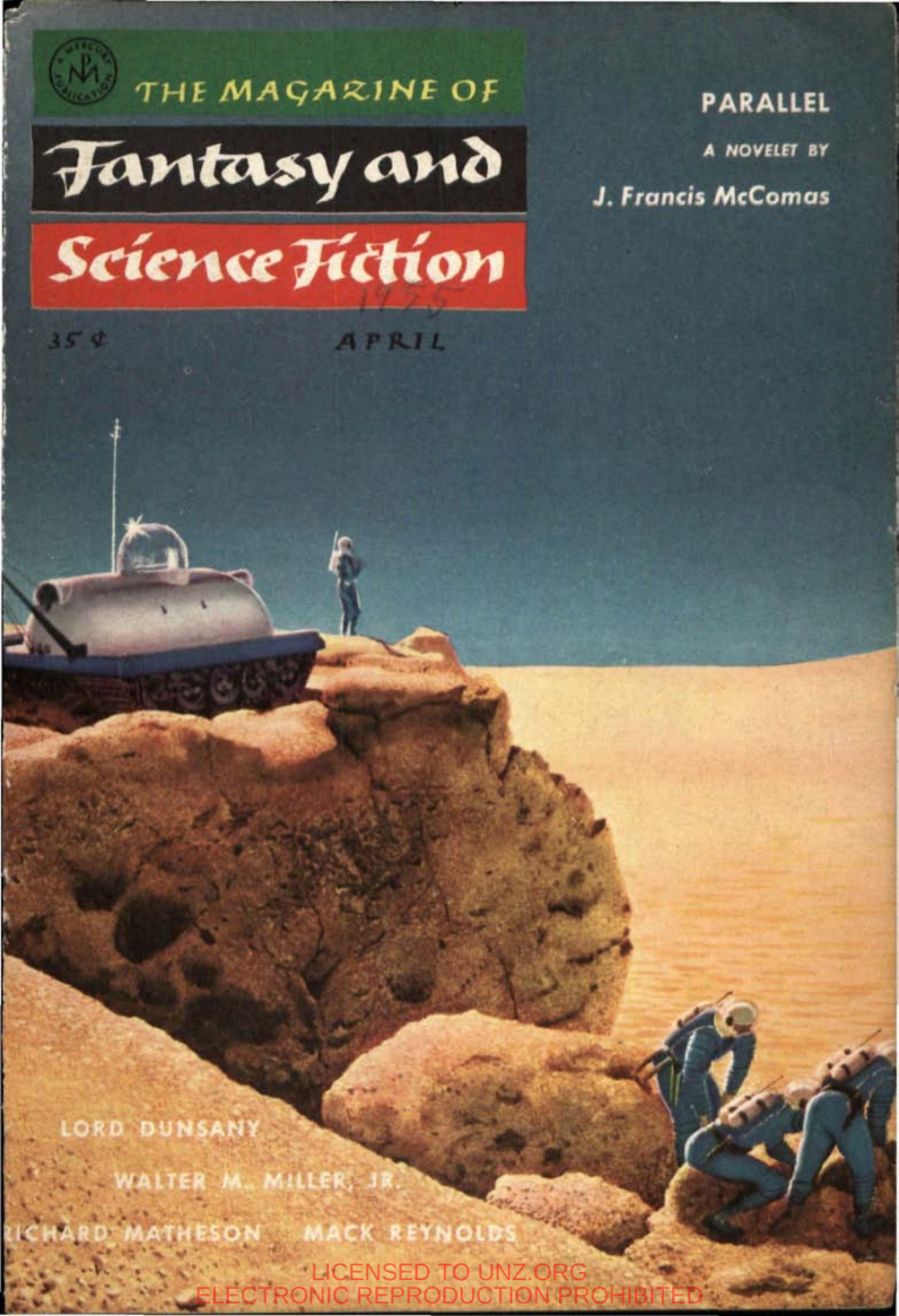
PARALLEL

A NOVELET BY

J. Francis McComas



LORD DUNSANY

WALTER M. MILLER, JR.

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 8, No. 4 APRIL

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It's common enough in fiction for Terran explorers to land on a remote planet and discover an Alien Menace Inconceivable Upon Earth; but there is one certain type of menace, deadly to civilization-as-we-know-it, which a proper knowledge of our own history might lead us to expect on other worlds. J. Francis McComas' avocations include the study of history (already on its way to becoming as sadly neglected as in the future which he postulates), which enables him to create a convincingly real alien threat in this strongly conceived and executed novelet.

Parallel

by J. FRANCIS McCOMAS

FAR OUT ON THE GRAY PLAIN HARDIN saw three dots moving above the rippling, knee-high grass. He lifted his glasses and, after a moment of adjustment, he picked out what appeared to be three sextupeds making a warily fast way toward the ship. A more precise focusing of the binoculars showed that the strange mounts were about the size of an overgrown Percheron, that they had riders, and they were, indeed, making a warily fast way toward the ship.

Captain Hardin lowered the glasses and glanced down at his lieutenant.

"Visitors," he said shortly. "Seems that damn sea of grass is inhabited after all. Everything in order?"

The lieutenant, a thin, dark man named Stiegesen, looked unhurriedly around the gun pit they had dug just in front of the ship's nose.

"Gun set for full 180 degree sweep, flat trajectory of one and a half meters. Crew alerted. Auxiliary equipment to hand, exploder flares, paral-gas bombs, compression grenades." Then he let excitement tinge his voice. "Intelligent life, Captain?"

Hardin stared at the three mounts zigzagging closer. "Intelligent enough to have developed what looks like cavalry," he grunted.

Stiegesen chuckled. "Remember, we come in peace, Captain."

"Sure, sure," drawled Hardin. "You and I know that. Our merry picknickers back there," he jerked a thumb at the ruined city astern of the ship, "know it. But do they — out there — know it?"

The two soldiers stared out over the plain whose gray monotony rolled unchecked to meet a far horizon. The three riders had now

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moved to within 500 meters of the survey ship. They were still coming very fast.

"Well," Hardin said, "I guess we make the first contact." He laughed shortly. "The dumb military and . . . what?"

He stepped three paces forward. The riders, going at a deceptively awkward trot, drew closer. When they were not more than 150 meters away, Captain Hardin raised his right arm high, the palm of his hand outward, his left arm hanging stiffly away from his body. He stood thus, waiting. He could see the riders quite clearly but he couldn't distinguish details. They were hunched in high saddles and, as far as he could observe, seemed pretty much humanoid. They had two arms and two legs; one arm cradled some sort of weapon, the other held reins that hung over their mounts' long, thin necks. Apparently the two legs were disproportionately short for they were set in unusually high stirrups.

Hardin waved his uplifted hand and called to them.

Their response was immediate.

The three mounts jerked to a sliding stop, reins were grabbed with teeth, and the three riders lifted their weapons and aimed them with both arms. Captain John Leslie Hardin hit the dirt. He heard a triple twang, and then, behind him, three successive *thocks* as missiles thudded against the nose of the ship.

"Don't shoot!" he roared to the men behind him.

"Keep down, Captain!" cried Stiegesen. "Here comes another volley!"

"I see it," grunted Hardin. He cautiously raised his head just a little and watched as the riders aimed what looked very much like the ancient crossbows on display in the War College weapons museum.

The three short arrows fell between him and the gun pit.

"You're the target!" shouted Stiegesen.

"Give them a flare!" ordered Hardin.

A soldier balanced a stubby rocket, depressed its firing switch, and with a *swoo — oosh* it arced skyward, hung in the air above the three attackers and exploded with a loud bang. The bang was followed by a glare of almost unbearable brilliance. The six-legged mounts whistled and shied, raising their front sets of legs. Their riders seesawed them on the middle legs, jerked them under control, wheeled, and galloped away from the ship.

John Leslie Hardin stood up and methodically brushed the dirt from his uniform. Stiegesen leaped out of the gun pit, ran over to him and gasped, "You hurt, Captain?"

"Hell, Stieg, I'm still young enough to take a flop without straining anything."

"You skinned your nose a little," observed Stieg. "And you seem to have lost your helmet. Here it is. Otherwise, sir, it was a most graceful dive. Most graceful."

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"Thank you," grinned Hardin. "For the helmet, that is, not for criticism of my performance."

Hardin put the helmet on his square blond head and flexed his big arms again. The two men stood together, gazing out over the rolling prairie. The flare had dimmed out and save for three dwindling smudges on the horizon, the plain was as it had been before the brief encounter.

"Well, that's that," murmured Stiegesen. "Not exactly as we thought it would be, eh?"

"That's that for the time being," replied Hardin. He took a long look through the binoculars, then handed them to his junior. "Here, take a look . . : over to what we would call the northeast."

"Mmm . . . a hell of a big cloud of dust . . . I can just distinguish a few of them. Too far off to tell them apart, but I'd guess there are thousands in that dust. Trouble?"

"Could be. You said we didn't anticipate this, Stieg. Perhaps the scientific brass didn't, but I assure you I didn't leave it out of my calculations. Not that anybody looks at *my* figures." Stiegesen followed as Hardin turned and started back toward the gun pit. "Let's get organized," Hardin went on. "Sound the emergency recall!"

The lieutenant spoke into his chest phone and almost immediately the scout's honker started braying mournfully.

The two men walked past the gun pit toward the ship's port and Hardin went on, "You keep an eye on everything, Stieg, but stay closest to the gun. Remember, I don't want any shooting unless I give the word." He stared hard at his subordinate.

"Yes, Captain. I understand."

"Good man. Who's in charge of the flame-thrower aft?"

"Sub-Lieutenant Teligny. A steady youngster."

"Right. Give him his orders. Make sure he's got some compression grenades and paral bombs."

"Yes, sir."

"That leaves you O. D. outside the ship until relieved." His voice relaxed. "Take it easy, Stieg. Don't shoot —" a tag of history learned in his plebe year came to mind — "don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes!"

"If they have any, Captain. Whites to their eyes, I mean."

Hardin laughed. "If they don't, maybe their six-legged horses do." He sobered. "Well, here comes the research party. Watch me catch hell for not having a camera set up!"

"Hah! We had lots of time for that!"

The leaders of the preliminary survey of Wolf 359 IV were squeezed around a table in the tiny messhall of the scout-and-survey ship. Each had one of the short arrows that had so narrowly missed Hardin and was studying it very closely. Finally, Dr. Giovanni Tresco, Deputy-Administrator of the Expedition and synthesist of the first landing,

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lifted his head, chewed on a cigar whose fatness matched his own and said, "But what are they, Captain? I'm vaguely familiar with the mechanics of archery but these arrows are much shorter than normal, aren't they?"

"They're crossbow bolts, sir."

"Crossbow?"

"A weapon coexistent with the earliest firearms and the long bow. And, in many ways, better than either. It had greater accuracy than the musket, much greater striking power than the clothyard arrow." He described briefly the mechanics of the arbalest. "So you see, gentlemen," he concluded, "its great weakness was its slow rate of fire. Cranking up a crossbow was an even slower process than the reloading of the flintlock musket."

"But I thought you reported that these — ah, beings, shot at you several times within a very short space of time." That was Struthers-Stote, the socio-psychologist and cultural relations expert.

"If these natives are acquainted with the gear principle they could easily have developed a rapid-cranking arbalest."

Struthers-Stote's eyes glittered behind his contact lenses. He thrust his narrow head forward at Hardin and said, "Dash it all, Captain, I do wish you'd had a camera set up. We'd have better evidence of their cultural development than these crude . . . weapons." His tone made the word *weapons* an obscenity.

"My first duty was to attend to the defenses of the ship, Doctor," Hardin said stiffly.

"Of course," soothed Tresco. He rubbed a plump jowl with pudgy fingers. "You were quite right, Captain. And I should imagine we will have plenty of chances for pictures. Their main body should be along any minute, now."

"Good heavens, gentlemen!" cried Gearhardt, the archeologist. "Look — these bolts are tipped with metal!"

"So?" queried Struthers-Stote.

Gearhardt whipped a magnifier from his tunic and studied the bolt very closely. As he peered he said, "The shaft is of wood, but the tip is of metal . . . *reworked* metal." He dropped the magnifier on the table and beamed at them. "An interesting hypothesis emerges," he murmured. "You will remember that today's preliminary exploration of the ruined city showed the presence of no metal whatsoever — other than a few useless scraps scattered about. While the stone buildings were intact, there was irrefutable evidence that their metal — ah, equipment had been forcibly removed. Remember the building we decided had been a factory?"

"Lord!" exclaimed Hardin. "No metal, eh? And you think —"

"Gentlemen, please!" Tresco lifted a fat hand. "Forgive me for interrupting you, but we must discuss these curiosa later. I must make my preliminary report to the *Messenger*. He glanced down at the notepad in

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front of him. "I have all the pertinent data, I think —"

"One moment please, Doctor," Struthers-Stote lifted a long forefinger.

"Yes."

"I'd like to repeat — and enlarge upon — one question to Captain Hardin."

He swung in his chair and faced the soldier, pointing the long finger as he opened his mouth.

But Hardin beat him to it.

"I know the question, Doctor," he said wearily. "I can assure you that I committed no action, however innocent-seeming to me — or any other Terran — that the natives of this planet might have interpreted as a hostile move."

Struthers-Stote's narrow jaw dropped. "How'd you know I was going to ask you that?" he blurted. Hardin heard Gearhardt chuckle very softly.

"Because," Hardin said, "they teach us a bit of psychology at the War College. And I know also, Doctor, that you simply won't admit that I — or any other military man — am as devoted to peace as you are."

"Now, see here —"

"Gentlemen!" Tresco's voice was sharp. "Captain Hardin, I will agree that Doctor Struthers-Stote is overly suspicious of the military. But his question is a good one, really. We must be sure . . ."

"Please report to the *Messenger* that the three natives were fully aware that I had no weapons in my hands, that my attitude was not hostile, and that they fired on me from a distance of at least 100 meters without making any effort whatsoever to investigate me."

"Very good. Thank you, Captain." Tresco hauled himself out of his chair.

Gearhardt leaned over to Hardin and said quietly, "Tell me what you think, Captain Hardin." He fingered the bolt. "An aboriginal weapon, using worked metal —"

"The arbalest was not an aboriginal weapon, sir. It was produced by a very complex culture."

"Eh? My apologies . . . I bow to your knowledge of history and wish I shared it. But is it not a cultural clash — this metal tip and this wooden shaft?"

"The metal tip is more crudely worked than the shaft."

"Because it is reworked?"

"Lord," breathed Hardin. . . .

Just as Dr. Tresco reached the door of the control room it was yanked open and a crewman rushed out and cried, "Lieutenant Stiegesen on the ground radio, Captain! Says it's urgent!"

"Turn up the speaker," Tresco ordered. "We'll all listen."

The rest of them left the table and crowded around the open door as Stiegesen's voice crackled through the speaker.

"Several thousand mounted beings coming at us," he reported matter-of-factly. "About 600 to 800

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meters away, advancing slowly in a long line. Their right flank's anchored along on the bank of that river to the west of us; their left, if it gets here, will just hit those hills where the city's ruins break off. Looks like they're not friendly, but the light's so bad I can't be sure. Standing by for orders."

Hardin shouldered his way into the control room. "On with all landing lights! Full power!" he barked. A crewman pulled switches. Hardin picked up the mike and said, "You have your lights, Lieutenant. Stand by, I'm coming out!"

Struthers-Stote manfully forced himself to stand aside so that Dr. Tresco could puff his way first down the ramp, then clattered headlong after him. Gearhardt followed Hardin close enough to say, "Young man, when we have the leisure, I'd like to discuss those ah, bolts, and their makers too, a little more."

"So should I, sir," panted Hardin. And added grimly, "*If* we get that leisure."

The range of the landing lights was a thousand meters plus and the host of natives was clearly illuminated. Hardin strode over to where Stiegesen stood by the gun, cast an approving eye over the alert crew, then gazed out over the brightly lit plain. The sun had set and twilight crouched just beyond the range of the Terran lamps, seeming to Hardin ready to spring forward in company with the hesitating wave of the mounted beings.

"They stopped when the lights went on," muttered Stiegesen. "But not for long, I bet."

"Noisy, aren't they?"

Indeed, the wave of riders, a wave at its crest and bursting for release, was not a quiet thing. The six-legged mounts whistled as they pawed the ground; their riders yelled hoarse guttural cries that sounded to Hardin's untrained ear mere wordless shouts, furious, frenzied mouthings. The blazing light showed most of them crouched in their high saddles, reins in their mouths, crossbows at the ready. But here and there one sat upright, holding a bannered staff in one hand, a long cutting weapon in the other.

"Humanoids," breathed Tresco. "Humanoids . . ."

"But fur-covered," muttered Struthers-Stote. "No . . . fur clothes."

"Very possibly the latter," nodded Gearhardt.

Somewhere along the ragged line, or just behind it, a drum began to beat. The staccato rapping swelled in volume, puctuated here and there by the wailing notes of some kind of horn.

"I believe they're going to attack," Hardin said quietly. "Perhaps you gentlemen had better get back in the ship."

"Attack!" sneered Struthers-Stote. "Is that the only word you can think of!" He gathered his long body together and jumped over the gun pit.

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"Get back!" cried Hardin.

"No! This is the decisive moment! We must establish contact before it's too late!" And the psychologist trotted toward the yelling mass.

"Dr. Struthers-Stote!" bellowed Tresco. "I command you —"

"Be quite all right," the psychologist flung over his shoulder. "Needs a bit of a firm hand, that's all."

"But you have no equipment," groaned Tresco, then was silent as they all watched the skinny figure half-walk, half-run across the plain. He held both hands high. Hardin discovered that he was holding his breath; as he let it go with a deep sigh he discovered something else . . . he was *afraid*. Not for himself, but for the pompous ass who was so incredibly unaware of the risk he was running.

"Damn poor discipline we keep," Stiegesen muttered cynically.

Hardin grunted wordlessly and looked over at Tresco and Gearhardt. The old man was pale; he, at least, had some comprehension of the danger potential, but Tresco's eyes were shining and his big cigar a mangled stub. He watched Struthers-Stote like a researcher observing the ultimate stage of an experiment. Hardin shook his head. It was all a pretty problem to Tresco, he thought, and would be until — he shook his head and put the rest of the thought from him.

The Terran had reached the beings of another star system. Two riders leaned toward the Terran and his fellows could see him gesture. Then the front line, Struthers-Stote passed through, the line closed up and Dr. Struthers-Stote could no longer be seen.

Tresco expelled a great sigh.

"He's done it!" he cried.

Gearhardt nodded.

"At least they seem willing to communicate," he said.

"I envy him," muttered Tresco. Then he added generously, "Even more, I envy his courage."

Hardin looked at his lieutenant. Stiegesen shrugged.

"Well," cried Tresco, "Doctor Gearhardt, what are we waiting for? Let us join him!"

"Just a moment, Doctor Tresco!" Hardin's voice was coldly authoritative, but the excited Tresco missed its tone completely for he said gaily, "Yes, Captain? Do you wish to come with us?"

"I do not!"

"Ah, yes," Tresco tried to sound kind. "Your first duty is to the ship, of course —"

"And to the ship's personnel, sir!" He ranged himself between the two scientists and the gun pit and stood there, legs spread apart, hand on his holster. Tresco gaped at him, wordless.

"I quite realize," Hardin said calmly, "that my position in this expedition is one of small importance. That's quite proper. But I do have one duty, delegated to me by the Minister-President of the

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United Solar Nations himself. And that is: whenever I judge this expedition, or any part of it, to be in physical danger, I am to take supreme command and adopt whatever measures I deem necessary for the general safety."

"But man, that's absurd — you saw that they —"

"I have seen nothing to convince me that this part of our mission is not in extreme danger. Therefore, I order you to stay right where you are, in the immediate vicinity of the ship. If you attempt to disobey my orders, Lieutenant Stiegesen will place you in confinement."

Tresco, his jowls quivering, spluttered but Gearhardt placed a hand on his shoulder and said calmly, "The Captain is well within his rights, Doctor. And I must admit I prefer the conservative approach to this situation."

"Very well," grunted Tresco. "But you will agree, Captain, that nothing very alarming happened to Doctor Struthers-Stote?"

"I don't know what *is* happening to him."

"Let us wait," soothed Gearhardt. "And wonder what strange report our cultural relations expert will bring back to us."

They waited for nearly a Terran hour. Gearhardt went back into the ship, came out with his crossbow bolt and paced up and down, studying it. Tresco walked about for a bit, then sat down on the ground with his back against the side of the ramp. He lit one of his fat cigars and sat smoking with nervous puffs.

Hardin watched.

At the end of the hour the drums suddenly exploded into a hideous cacophony. The horns joined in and then a long, rolling yell went up from the native encampment. A few front line riders made short, frenzied dashes toward the ship, waved weapons or banners, wheeled and galloped back into their ranks.

As suddenly as it had arose, the sound ceased and quiet hung over the night.

Then the Terrans heard a thin scream.

"Jesus!" blurted one of the gun crew.

Hardin felt his stomach turn over. Tresco gulped, almost swallowing his cigar, and stumbled to his feet.

The scream came again, higher . . . almost above the sonic limit of the human voice.

"That — that is awful!" Gearhardt cried brokenly.

The screaming voice formed a single word. "Help!" it yelled. That was followed by a string of meaningless syllables and then the Terrans thought they heard the word "please!" horribly drawn out.

"What the devil are they doing to him," Stiegesen muttered to Hardin.

"He's terrified," Hardin said stolidly.

"Of what —"

"Of death, what else?"

Hardin took no heed of the two

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scientists behind him, nor did he seem to concern himself with his subordinate beside him. Hardin just stood quietly, peering at the horde, his big, burly figure taut and eager. He had not long to wait.

The drums sounded and even their roaring rattle was drowned out by the shrieks of the horde that had suddenly gone maniac.

Then there was a ripple in the forward line and a lone rider trotted forth toward the ship. Hardin saw that it was one of those who carried a banner. It (or he) carried something else . . . a bundle of something hanging over his (or its) saddlebow.

Tautness left Hardin and he jumped from the pit and started toward the oncoming rider.

"What is it?" someone cried.

"A messenger, I think. Keep me covered."

"Damn it!" cried Tresco. "I'm coming too!"

The rider came very close to the Terran group, swerved his mount, dumped the thing he carried, yelled mockingly and dashed off.

Hardin and the two scientists ran forward.

Close inspection showed that what seemed to be a heap of bloody clothes was really the body of Struthers-Stote. And only the body. Its head was missing.

Dr. Tresco vomited. Dr. Gearhardt swayed, but Hardin grabbed the old man's arm and said quietly, "Steady on, sir."

Tresco straightened and mumbled, "Sorry . . . where's the —"

"In their camp, of course. A trophy." Hardin stepped close to the pale man and said, "Dr. Tresco, if you want this mission to be a success, let me fire on them. Now!"

Tresco pulled his sagging body together.

"Are you mad, Captain? Even now, we must have no reprisals!"

"Dear God, sir! It's not a question of reprisal! It's —"

"No. We don't know what Struthers-Stote did wrong — poor fellow. We'll find out later . . ."

"Come back, Captain!" called Stiegesen. "They're going to attack!"

"Get going you two!" snapped Hardin.

"But the — the body," panted Gearhardt.

"I'll bring it. *Get going!*"

Hardin forced himself to pick up the ghastly ruin and carry it back and lay it, as decently as he could, under the ship, out of sight behind the ramp. Tresco and Gearhardt watched, shivering.

Hardin's uniform was stained in several places with patches of blood. He stared at them, wondering how long it had been since a Terran soldier had seen blood, his own or somebody else's, on his clothes. . . .

Then he felt the earth shake beneath him under the thudding of thousands of . . . hooves?

"All right, gentlemen," he said, "into the ship with you. I'll take care of our visitors."

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"Captain Hardin!" snapped Tresco.

"Yes, Doctor?"

"You have non-killing weapons?"

"Of course."

"Use them! The gun must be your last resort." He turned to Gearhardt. "Come, Doctor. Let us watch the progress of the defense from inside the ship."

Hardin grinned. God! how they trusted him! And what wondrous, idealistic, incredible fools they were!

A bolt thocked against the ship above him. He dropped to his hands and knees and crawled to the pit.

"Compression grenades!" he grunted. "Stun charge only!"

A rain of bolts sang through the air above him. Then there was the cough of grenade launchers and the men in the pit felt the fringe of the shock-wave as the grenades went off.

The wild charge skidded to an abrupt halt in a tangle of falling mounts and riders. Then the mass boiled forward again as the rear ranks attempted to ride over their fallen comrades.

"Another round!" barked Hardin. "Higher this time — get the rear echelons! And give their left flank a heavy load — that's still plenty lively!"

That second round of grenades broke the charge. At first the Terrans could see nothing but the bodies of men and mounts tumbling to the ground. Then they heard . . . silence. Drums, horns and voices all broke on a single note as panic swept through the broken ranks.

Then the horde turned and fled.

Hardin and Stiegesen, watching, saw a dismounted rider here and there yell frantically. At each call, a luckier comrade slowed, and without stopping, hauled the man afoot up behind him, then rode desperately for safety.

In a very few moments there was no movement that Hardin or Stiegesen could see. The gray plain stretched out before them, dotted with still heaps of riders and mounts.

"Well, that's over," grunted Stiegesen. He stood up and stretched.

Hardin followed suit and looked around the gun pit.

"Well done, men," he grinned. "Any casualties?"

The gun crew grinned back and announced that they were all in one piece.

"Good!" said Hardin. "Take a blow and then we'll go out and get ourselves some prisoners." He took out his cigaret case and passed it to Stiegesen.

"Thanks, Captain. Prisoners, eh?"

Hardin nodded as he puffed his cigaret alight. "Wonder if we could round up the whole lot. There's a couple of hundred out there."

"Don't see why not."

"Captain Hardin!" Dr. Tresco stood framed in the port.

"Damn!" muttered Hardin under his breath and saw Stiegesen grin tightly. He shrugged wearily and said aloud, "Yes, Doctor?"

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"Very well done, Captain!"

"Thank you, Doctor."

"I've been in constant communication with the *Messenger*," Tresco continued, "and the Administrator wishes me to give you his warmest congratulations for a job well done."

"That's very nice indeed, Doctor Tresco. But the job's not over yet. We're going out for a few prisoners."

"No, no!" Tresco almost fell in his haste to get down the ramp. Hardin politely walked over to him. "The Administrator made a particular point of that! You are to take no prisoners, do no further damage to these people! You are to confine your actions to purely defensive measures!"

"Taking prisoners is a good defense, Doctor! We've got to find out what makes these beings tick — we've got to impress them —"

"We must indeed. But the Administrator feels, as do I, that your recent . . . ah, martial display should have been very impressive. *Very* impressive. Now we must turn to more peaceful ways. The Administrator is sending down full research and contact teams in the morning."

"Peaceful!" grated Hardin. "After what happened to Struthers-Stote —"

"My dear Captain! If an unstable compound blows up and kills an experimenter, do that experimenter's friends and co-workers *hate* that compound and attempt to destroy it?"

"It isn't a question of hate," Hardin began, then he shrugged. "Very well, Doctor. We'll sit tight until morning."

"Good," Tresco nodded, took a final look around and started up the ramp. "Good night, Captain Hardin. Call me if I'm needed."

"Good night, Doctor."

Captain John Leslie Hardin stared up at the sky. His gaze soon caught the little moon that was the *Messenger*, Terran man's first starship, hanging well above the limit of the atmosphere of Wolf 359 IV, waiting until her spawn of scout ships had found the world below safe enough to risk landing the giant pioneer upon the first habitable planet which she had found in her star-journey.

"You'll never come down now!" Hardin growled suddenly.

"Why not?" asked Stiegesen.

Hardin turned his head and scowled. "I was not addressing you, Lieutenant."

"I'm sorry, sir." Stiegesen turned stiffly and stepped toward the gun.

"Wait, Stieg!" Hardin took the younger man's arm, spun him about to face him. "I'm up to my ears in frustration — sorry!"

"Certainly, Captain."

"And this is no time to pull rank on me, either," Hardin smiled.

"Sure, Les." Stiegesen jerked a thumb at the ship. "They've got me pretty touchy, too."

"Damn it," Hardin muttered, "we need prisoners. Badly."

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"Any special reason? Besides the usual, I mean."

Hardin chuckled. "Don't have to teach *you* tactics, do I, boy," he said affectionately. "And you've hit it: there is a special reason — over and above every purely military consideration."

"So?"

"Look at it two ways. First, the surviving members of that bunch think the lot out there is dead. If scouts come back in the morning and find them gone, they'll be sure of it . . . *and* they'll all be wondering what *we* do with enemy dead. That will give them a psychological jolt! On the other hand, if we freighted a batch of POW's up to the *Messenger*, *that* would scare hell out of the captives! We'd establish contact in a hurry — right away we'd have a talk . . . talk that those cowboys would listen to!"

"It makes sense — but it's too late now! They're coming to!"

The two men watched in grim silence as the stunned aliens recovered their senses. The first few sat up, bewildered, and stared about them. An animal whistled softly, grunted, reared itself up, wobbled on four legs, put down the other two and spread all six wide. A lone native watched the animal, then suddenly scrambled to his own feet and stood for a moment, swaying. Then he staggeered over to the animal and mounted with clumsy haste; without looking back he rode off at an awkward trot. The rest of the scene was merely a repeat performance of this one action. Toward the end, they recovered in groups and their retreat was less hasty, a reckless few even waiting a few moments in their saddles, as if daring the Terrans to make another move.

Then, in the far distance, the drums sounded.

"The first have caught up with the main body," Hardin said.

"Think they'll come back?"

"Positive! Their evidence is that we can't kill!"

Sure enough, they came back . . . but only to the absolute limit of the ship's lights. There the horde halted and the two watchers could see the light of countless fires spring up. The horns wailed occasionally, but the drums were silent.

"Camped for the night." Hardin's tone was casual. "We're in a state of siege, m'boy."

"You'd better get some sleep, Les."

"Not yet . . . you sleepy?"

"Not in the least!"

"Good . . . I'd like to talk to you, Stieg. Come on over here." He moved off to one side of the ship area, out of earshot of the crews around the gun and flamethrower. "Sit down and have a cigaret."

They smoked in comfortable silence for a moment, then Hardin said abruptly, "Stieg, I've begun to think that the Committee of 2117 made a mistake. A big mistake!"

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"Hey?"

"You heard me."

"Now look, Les — you're tired and frustrated — hell! you're the first CO that's had a fight on his hand for 200 years! But that's no excuse for talking what amounts to treason!"

"It's not treason," Hardin said calmly. "Let me put it this way: I think the decisions of '17 were okay for the Solar System."

He paused, and Stiegesen lifted his dark brows. "Now you're backtracking, Les."

"I'm not. . . . I'll try to explain." His voice was low, musing. "Stieg, life — plus aptitude tests, plus heredity factors, plus conditioning — has made us soldiers. Soldiers . . . the real pariahs of our society."

"Don't tell me you're feeling sorry for yourself!"

"Of course I'm not. Particularly since I feel that the soldier — the twenty-fourth century soldier, that is, and not one of those brass-bound idiots of bygone days — is just about to come into his own!"

"I guess you're referring to this setup, but I don't follow you."

"All right. You're a soldier, a member of a society that glorifies the scientist — the educated, reasoning man — and regards the soldier as a necessary evil. You're a mug, because, by the standards of your culture, you're not particularly well-educated. But what science have *you* studied, been forced to study, that the great Doc Tresco can't even think about?"

"Too easy," laughed Stiegesen. "History. Next question."

"Yes, history. Considered by the Committee of '17 to be nothing more than a miserable record of wars, of cultural and economic conflicts, an endless chronicle of man's petty, vicious outbreaks against the peace of himself and his fellows!"

Hardin took a final puff of his cigaret and tossed it on the ground and stamped it out with the heel of his boot.

"Wasn't it?"

"Not completely — and you know it!"

"Well . . . it wasn't . . . but how does that matter? How did the Committee go wrong?" Stiegesen laughed awkwardly. "Mind you, I'm not agreeing that it did!"

"Ummm. Stieg, when the world finally exploded in the Twentieth Century and blew itself to bits in the first decade of the Twenty-First, those surviving bits decided to start completely fresh. Which was all right; the results have damn well proved them to be correct. But I think — I've always thought — that they went a little too far with their rearrangements in banning the study of the history of modern man. And I've a hunch that Gearhardt agrees with me."

"What! Treason from a scientist? What *are* we coming to?"

Hardin chuckled and puffed at another cigaret.

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"Don't worry," he said, "that old gentleman hasn't committed himself in so many words. I'm just playing a hunch. And I've always wondered how an enthusiastic archeologist could break off his researches with the foundation of the Roman city state. What a temptation it must be to go on, dig up the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries!"

"Look, Les," Stiegesen was no longer smiling, "you're doing a sweet job of beating around the bush! What has all this argument and counter-argument got to do with those wild men out there? If they are men . . ."

"They're men in the sense that any reasoning life form is a man." Hardin gazed off at the distant line of campfires. "All right. The law of 2117 decreed that only we soldiers, of all humanity, should know about history because we exist to protect society from its enemies . . . from within and from *without.* By studying history we'd always know what to expect because, m'boy, within easily predictable variations, history repeats itself . . . or did, *on Terra*, until we, and other instruments, were set up to check any such repetitive lapses."

Stiegesen whistled softly.

"Got you!" he exclaimed in a soft whisper. "You're saying that this wild bunch is a part of *our* history, repeating itself *here!*"

"It had on Mars and Venus."

"I'll agree . . . but what part?"

Hardin eased himself to his feet and his junior followed suit. As Hardin straightened his tunic he said, "I'm not sure yet. I want you to do some independent thinking about it and let me know what you decide. Also, I want to take a good look at that ruined city tomorrow. I'm guessing it's just as important a part of the equation I'm looking for as that rampaging herd of men and animals is."

He looked earnestly at the younger man. "Think about it, Stieg. Think hard." Then he straightened and said crisply, "Okay, back to work. Take the first watch and call me at 6!"

The brief intimacy was ended. Stiegesen saluted and answered, "Right, sir. Sleep well, sir."

Hardin said, "Thank you, Lieutenant. Keep an eye out for snipers," and strode toward the ramp.

The other scout ship landed in the morning around 10 o'clock, earthtime. Hardin watched as it circled above the camp of the besiegers; at first, there was considerable confusion as the natives ran for their mounts. But order was quickly established; they ranged themselves in a rough square while Hardin nodded a tactician's approval. If the ship landed among them, or dropped missiles, they could all gallop outward, away from the center of danger.

As he watched through his binoculars, his mouth tightened. They

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weren't particularly afraid, but members of a society as primitive as theirs should have been panicked by flying ships. So, Hardin reasoned, while a cold anger welled up within him, they associated the second ship with the first . . . and they knew the first ship was harmless. No Terran weapon yet demonstrated had *killed*. So, really, the only thing these natives feared (or respected?) was death — death sudden and irrevocable. Under his breath Hardin cursed the very rational voyagers from earth who had forgotten (or never heard of) the rational irrationality of the primitive.

The second ship lined up alongside the first and as Hardin's men enlarged the pit and placed gun and flame-thrower to cover both ships, Administrator Jeltenko made an impressive debarkation and shook hands warmly with his deputy, Tresco. He had a smile for Gearhardt and a friendly nod for Hardin.

A few riders dashed quite close to the ships, loosed a volley of bolts, then skittered back out of range.

The Administrator smiled gently (the bolts had fallen far short of the ship area) and murmured something about "rather wild children." He stopped smiling when Tresco and Hardin showed him the remains of Struthers-Stote. He looked at them a long time and only the pallor of his handsome face showed his upset.

"We must bury him," Administrator Jeltenko said and the gun crew did some more digging and the Administrator read the words of the universal burial service, committing the soul of Struthers-Stote to the God who gave it and his body to an alien soil from which it never sprang.

First casualty, brooded Hardin . . . and what a pitiful, futile casualty it was. . . .

Then, technicians scurried about, unloading equipment from the second scout.

"Now, my dear Doctor," the Administrator smiled down at Tresco, "we shall make an all-out effort to communicate. I've brought along the cinema projector, with the animations telling our story. Doctor Hadley's brought along his symbol projector and speaker. If he and they aren't conversing in rudimentary Basic Solarian ten minutes after he gets going, why" — he chuckled and Hadley tried to look properly modest — "why . . . we'll use the cinema. If that fails — but I rather doubt it will — we've got a tidy lot of gifts."

"Excellent," beamed Tresco. "By this afternoon, Solarian man and Wolfian man will have established a modus vivendi." I feel it in my bones," he tapped his big paunch, "here, behind all this fat."

Jeltenko chuckled amiably.

Hardin looked for Gearhardt, saw him standing a little apart, watching the sorting of machines and parts with obvious boredom.

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Hardin strode over to the old man.

"Doctor Gearhardt," he said, "may I have a word with you?"

The archeologist smiled a welcome. "A thousand, Captain! I find the activities of these busy little beavers rather dull."

"Their work's a bit too contemporary for you, eh? If they were just digging out a tomb, now —".

"I should be down in the hole with them," Gerahardt said candidly.

"*Beavers* is a good word for them," Hardin said slowly. "They're building a dam, all right — but it will never hold back that flood out there . . . when it gets ready to roll."

Gearhardt cocked a shaggy eyebrow. "So. Well, young man, I agree with you. Which is heresy, of course."

Hardin smiled with relief. "Well, Doctor, as one heretic to another, I'd like to make a suggestion."

"And that is . . .?"

"If you want to make any further exploration of those ruins, do it now . . . while it's still safe!"

"Safe?"

"I haven't been in the city, of course. But from what I've heard you say, it sounds like a fine setup for a series of ambushes."

"Ambushes, Captain?" He turned slowly and stared out at the horde, whose drums and horns were now beating out a wild cacophony, then turned back and gazed thoughtfully at the low bulk of the corpse of the dead city. "Of course. Why should they content themselves with a — a — what is your military term?"

"Frontal attack."

"Yes, frontal attack . . . Our vision is really quite narrow, isn't it?"

"Not narrow, sir," Hardin said boldly. "Untrained."

"More heresy," Gearhardt chuckled. "Ah, well . . . any further suggestions, Captain?"

"Not a suggestion, sir, but a request. I want very much to see those ruins. Not only because I'm naturally curious — who wouldn't be! But I want to see, too, if they back up a theory of mine."

"The problem of the arbalest bolts?"

"That's tied in with it."

Gearhardt grinned. "Since I am more concerned with the past of this planet than its present, I don't think Doctor Jeltenko will be insulted if I beg off attending his forthcoming . . . ah, demonstrations. And he'll certainly be sympathetic when I tell him I'm afraid of continuing my researches alone and want the company of the big, bold Captain Hardin."

"Thank you, sir! Thank you very much."

"Come along, young man. We'll see who thanks who when this is all over. . . ."

Hardin and Gearhardt climbed the gentle slope that led from the little valley where the ships lay up to the plateau above the river

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whereon some Wolfian race had built their great city.

The first contact with any relics of a vanished race is indescribable. The observer's emotions surge too strongly, there is too bewildering an awe — a completely new kind of wonder — to permit his objective cataloging of impressions. John Leslie Hardin just looked. For a long time he stood quite still and stared at the orderly rows of lovely, low buildings. The citizens had built horizontally, they had had plenty of ground space and they had used it. Far ahead of him, toward the geometrical center of the city, he could see a few higher buildings but even these had only three or four stories.

He walked slowly down the center of the street before him. The street itself was spaciously wide, paved with an artificial compound whose toughness still stood firm against the assault of the planet's gray weeds and grasses. It was as smooth and uncracked as on the day it was laid. As Hardin walked, a sense of unease crept over him until suddenly he realized it was due to the clatter of his own boots. He stopped, then, and let the awful silence of that which is dead regain its impersonal tranquility. Gearhardt took his arm.

"Sorry to intrude, Captain," he murmured, "but didn't you yourself say we must be on the alert?"

Hardin shook his head, as if to clear it. "Sorry," he muttered, "but this is the first time anything like this has happened to me."

"I know. I remember when, as a young man, I helped dig the equatorial desert of western Mars — but never mind that. Even now, one wonders . . . let us walk on! Where?"

"Toward the center of the town, I guess."

"Good. Let us move over here, on what was surely a sidewalk for pedestrians. Perhaps you can get some of the feel of it as we go."

The rhythm of their boots was an alien thing. A lone bird gave a frightened cry and fled from a rooftop to the upper air.

"What is this part?" asked Hardin. "A residential area?"

"Yes. Like to take a look?"

"Later, I guess," Hardin's tone was reluctant. "I've got to get the over-all picture . . . if we have time. Tell me about these houses."

"Well . . . you will observe that, exterior-wise, each home is severely simple, in complete structural harmony with its neighbor. As if each were a segment of a master plan. Individual taste and preference — always excellent I might say — is displayed solely in the interior. Inside the homes we have found and photographed all sorts of statuary, what must have been mural paintings — faded now beyond all deciphering — and remarkably variable room arrangements."

Hardin slowed as they approached an intersection, cast a quick glance in all directions, then resumed his steady pace.

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"Were they humanoid, Doctor?" he asked.

"Undoubtedly. The statuary shows that. And the construction — for example, the few stairs we've seen . . . actually just level-breakers — might have been built for you and me. And the dimensions of the rooms, the non-metallic fixtures — oh, all sorts of data confirm that these people were of the same bodily structure as Terran man."

"Umm . . . Doctor, last night you mentioned a building you think had been a factory —"

"Ah! I thought you'd like to see that! It lies straight ahead."

When Dr. Hadley, the expedition's linguist, set up his loudspeaker the horde seemed fascinated. Despite Stiegesen's diffident suggestion, Hadley had set up his equipment twenty-five meters in advance of the gun. He stood there, mike in hand, as the projector, beaming from just behind the gun pit, shot a simple line drawing of a man on the screen. Dr. Hadley then clearly enunciated the Basic Solarian word for man. Drawing of a woman next, with Hadley giving the word for same. Then a man again, followed by the lady. Since science knows no false modesty, both figures were in the nude. Interplanetary exploration within the Solar System had shown long ago that alien races could recognize and classify genitalia even if the rest of the bodily surface structure was meaningless to them.

The first sound of Hadley's many-times amplified voice caused a little confusion in the watching horde. Some of the sextupeds whistled in fear and one or two riders departed abruptly, but in moments all was calm and the long lines of riders hunched quietly in their saddles, listening to the booming voice.

Basic Solarian could be spoken by a vocal mechanism evolved for nasal Universal American, lisping Polar Martian, or grunting Middle Venusian . . . to say nothing of Lingua Africana gutturals or upper register Sioux. It should, Hadley was certain, be equally easy for these wild men. He worked through the negative and affirmative, the *I* and *you*, and accompanied a drawing of a man throwing away an assortment of weapons with the BS word for *peace*.

Then he began to perspire, a reaction that always infuriated him but one inevitable when he was under any kind of tension. Dr. Hadley was a tubby, earnest little man and very jealous of his interplanetary reputation. It occurred to him that that reputation was in grave danger and the danger was no fault of his. Why didn't one of these stupid barbarians — just one of them! — gallop up and repeat a single word after him! It was all so carefully planned, semantically!

But there was no response. Over and over again, he enunciated the greeting terms, the identification words. . . .

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Then, finally, he got a response . . . but not the one he had anticipated.

The natives began to laugh. And as they laughed, the drums rolled, their horns tootled, and their mounts whistled. The laughs changed to jeering yells. Dr. Hadley stepped up the speaker's volume. But the power of the speaker had its limit and that limit could not cope with the volume generated by thousands of screeching men and animals intensified by the noise of hundreds of drums and horns.

Dr. Hadley suddenly turned off his speaker and, his damp face red with fury, trotted back to the group around the Administrator. A lone rider loosed a bolt that fortunately went wide of its mark. Dr. Hadley was too angry to notice.

"Sir," he cried to the Administrator, "I've failed — because I had nothing to go on! How can you talk with people who won't talk with *you!* How —"

"Never mind, Hadley," soothed the Administrator, "you made a gallant effort and it shall be reported as such. Now, we'll try the cinema. . . ."

The street ended abruptly and Hardin found himself facing a broad, open square. He saw that it stretched on either side of him for several blocks and he estimated its width to be at least 75 meters. Over the tangle of wild grass and occasional dwarfed trees he could see the outline of a single, very large building.

"That's the factory," Gearhardt announced. The two men made their way rapidly through the ragged grass. "Now you'll see how neatly these people solved the problem of industrial housing. They simply put up their factories anywhere and built parks around them. They probably had no smoke problem. So, none of those grimy, smoggy, incredibly ugly industrial sections which we still have in a few of our own cities."

They walked up three broad low stairs and went through a doorway into a large anteroom.

"Observe they used the sliding door principle." Gearhardt was frankly lecturing now and just as frankly enjoying it.

"What were the doors made of?"

"My guess is some kind of magnetized alloy. The only method that could ensure sealed closing of sliding doors. If the doors *were* of wood, you may be sure we'd have found traces. We haven't." They passed through a series of small rooms. "Offices, just like home. And now, the factory itself."

Windowless, it was a very dim room, its sole light furnished by the open doorway behind them and another at its far end. Hardin walked slowly about, picking his way around an irregular array of what seemed to be long, low tables made of stone, or a stone-like compound. Here and there the floor was pitted with jagged holes. The

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tables themselves were deeply scarred in places; looking more closely, Hardin saw that there were regular rows of these deep gouges and that they appeared on one side of the tables only. Gearhardt smiled and nodded slightly as he watched Hardin make his careful inspection.

The soldier gazed up at the walls last of all, saw on them traces of pigment. Then he noticed holes in the walls, spaced at regular intervals: oblong holes, small, high up, almost at the angle of wall and ceiling.

Hardin sighed. Scarcely aware of what he was doing, he moved over and sat down on one of the tables. He took out his cigaret case and, still staring around the room, he extracted a cigaret, put it in his mouth and puffed. He forgot to put the case back in his pocket.

Gearhardt sat down beside him.

"Well, young man," he smiled quizzically, "let us see what kind of an archeologist you'd have made. Describe this room . . . as it *was*."

"A factory, of course. Machines, made of metal, were set in the floor — in those holes — and fixed to these tables. The workers probably sat in metal chairs —"

"Or wooden ones."

"Yes. And the room was air-conditioned."

"Why do you say that?"

"Those holes in the walls probably once had grated vents. And there are no windows."

"A good argument. We also discovered these walls are soundproof."

"Question: what happened to the machines?"

"You tell me, young man."

"I think I can. But let's go outside, shall we? We've got to be on the alert, you know. And all this makes me —"

"Uncomfortable?"

"No . . . unhappy."

"I feel the same. . . . Let us go."

They walked outside and sat down on the broad, shallow steps. The alien sun's red rays warmed them, but did not cheer.

"Yes," Hardin picked up the thread of their talk, "it all makes me unhappy. Which probably sounds odd to you — military men aren't supposed to have emotions —"

"Stuff!"

"Thanks." Hardin did not smile. "There was such a very gracious way of life in this city, Doctor. What ended it — cut it off?"

Dr. Gearhardt stroked his chin, a lecturer's gesture.

"No catastrophe of nature," he said. "These buildings are too well preserved. There's dirt, yes, the litter of centuries, but no collapsed ruins."

"Then, if nature wasn't their enemy, it must have been their fellow-beings?"

"We may use the word *human*, I think. Yes, a human invader overcame them, destroyed them, ripped the metal from the edifices they'd built up with such love and taste and warmth, then . . ."

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"Went away again."

"Went where, Captain?"

"Let me ask a couple of more questions, Doctor. Did these folk have air travel?"

"I doubt it. More likely, only land and water — there are wharves down at the river."

"Well then, what were their defenses?"

"Young man, I don't know. We've found no evidences of fortifications. These seem to have been a peaceful people. What weapons they had would have been constructed of metal, of course. . . ."

Hardin stretched his legs and stared somberly at his boot toes. After a long moment of silence, he looked up. "All right, sir, I'll tell you what I'm positive happened to this city and why its catastrophe affects us so vitally." He grinned suddenly. "It's unpardonable that a soldier should be lecturing a scientist, but I hope you'll try to forgive me."

"Young man, again I say stuff! I regard you as the shrewdest person in this expedition. Further, you know history — a science I know only partially. . . ."

"Well, sir, let's ask ourselves what kind of a people in *our* history didn't *occupy* a city once they'd conquered it. . . ."

The big screen showed in glowing color an animated diagram of the Solar System. The riders crowded forward to watch.

Lt. Stiegesen finished a whispered consultation with Sub-Lt. Teligny, then faded aft of the ships, dropped on his belly and was lost to sight in the rippling grass. Sub-Lt. Teligny moved unobtrusively forward and took a place in the gun pit.

The screen showed wondrous cartoons of Earth, Venus and Mars, pictured their vast cities, their peoples, their science. The audience watched in rapt silence.

"I fancy we're making headway now," smiled Jeltenko.

"Assuredly, assuredly," beamed Dr. Tresco.

There came a long, dramatic — but singularly humorless — sequence of man eschewing war and the weapons of war. It was humorless, but the audience roared with laughter. It capered, gesticulated, howled with glee. And a young technician, standing a respectful distance from his elders, muttered, "Oh, oh!"

Dr. Giovanni Tresco heard him. Curiously, the great man did not reprove the youth, but stared out at the hilarious mob with a worried frown.

When the departure of the *Messenger* was projected, the horde quieted briefly. But when the first scout ship was shown landing on their planet, they howled again and even the most complacent watcher knew it was a howl of fury.

Those in front lifted their crossbows and fired directly at the screen, ripping holes through it. The pro-

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jector clacked away and the picture, no longer a comprehensible whole but a cluster of ragged, meaningless parts, flickered on. Yelling riders rode up to the screen and slashed it to ribbons with their cutting weapons.

"Turn off that projector!" cried the Administrator.

The alien drums beat and the horns moaned.

"They're going to attack!" cried young Teligny. "Get back of the guns, please! Everybody!"

"Where's Lieutenant Stiegesen?" gasped the Administrator as, red-faced, white hair tumbling over his broad brow, he clambered past the gun pit.

Teligny's boyish face paled but he answered sturdily enough. "Off on reconnaissance, sir. I — I'm in charge of defense."

The Administrator frowned a majestic frown.

"A gross dereliction of duty!" he thundered. "As well as —" but the subaltern grabbed his leg and pulled him to the ground as three bolts whizzed through the air where the Administrator had been standing.

"Sorry, sir! But please get your people in the ship. Now!"

"God — young man, you saved my life —"

"Please, sir — get going!"

"Ah — yes, of course." The great man hauled himself to his hands and knees. "D'you know what to do?"

"Certainly, sir. Shall I let 'em have it?"

"If you mean shooting — emphatically not! You can do something else, can't you?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then don't kill any of them — God! here they come!"

The hapless men of science did not have time to get inside their ships. They huddled behind the ramps or lay flat on the ground while the youngster turned his back on them and gave his orders in a quiet, if slightly unsteady voice. The enlisted veterans grinned at him encouragingly and began to lob bombs and grenades.

"Well, that's it," Hardin concluded. "I lack data, of course — I should be able to see them close up, observe their community life, even talk with them — that's why I wanted prisoners."

He stood up, stretched, then tensed, listening.

"Lot of noise around the ships," he said calmly. "Guess we'd better be getting back."

"Yes." Gearhardt slowly got to his feet. "We seem to have made a series of mistakes," he said tiredly, "starting with a very big one in the year 2117."

"Then you think I'm right, sir?"

"Of course I do — what is your first name?"

"My friends call me Les — after my middle name, Leslie."

"You will permit me? Thank you.

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You are indeed right, Leslie." The old man looked wistfully at the low, graceful lines of the factory building, then shook his head. The two men walked down the steps toward the park. "Odd," Gearhardt said slowly, "even before we reached the moon we wrote and talked much of meeting alien life out among the stars. Never realizing that we'd had plenty of aliens on our own planet . . . from time to time."

Hardin nodded. "Even as late as the Nineteenth Century," he agreed. Then, "Hold it!" he barked.

A native cantered around the corner of the factory and entered the park. The Wolfian saw them, jerked hard on the reins, and the sextuped tossed its head violently. Hardin pulled out his handgun and waited.

The native did not pause more than one frozen instant. Then he lifted his arbalest and Hardin fired. The rider dropped his crossbow, stared at Hardin with great incredulity, then slowly slid out of his saddle and sprawled on the ground. The riderless mount whirled and started back just as two more natives rode into the park. They saw their fallen comrade first, then Hardin. He heard them laugh and saw them leisurely lift their bows.

Hardin fired. His shot was a little high, hitting his target in the shoulder. The man screamed and, dropping his bow, clapped a hand to his seared shoulder. The other's eyes widened, he half-turned in the saddle and, forgetting all about Hardin, watched unbelieving as his fellow writhed in agony.

Hardin aimed more carefully and burned the wounded man squarely between the eyes. The unhurt native's head slowly swiveled to watch the dead rider slump sideways out of his saddle. Then gaping, he gazed at Hardin. When the captain raised his gun again, the native screamed, frantically pulled his mount around and galloped out of sight.

Dr. Gearhardt made a wordless noise.

Hardin walked over and peered down toward the side of the factory. The area was clear. He stepped back to the two bodies. Dr. Gearhardt, face pale, slowly approached, staggering a little as he walked.

"Killing . . ." he muttered.

"Yes, killing," Hardin said coldly. "You saw the impact of *death* on the survivor?"

The archeologist nodded.

"We should have tried that in the first place. Now . . . it's too damn late! Well, let's take a look at these."

Squat, humanoid beings, with long torsos and short, bowed legs. Obviously they were born for the saddle. Hardin noted the garments first. They were dressed in the furs of animals; they wore thick dirty jackets; long trousers, equally dirty, were stuffed into boots of unfinished leather. The jackets were belted at the waist and pouches of bolts, broad-bladed knives, and other un-

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identifiable personal belongings were hung around the wide, bone-buckled belts. Then he looked closely at the face of the one he'd killed with the body shot.

"Long-headed," murmured Gearhardt, following his glance.

Hardin matter-of-factly opened the jacket at the throat. The deep tan of the face ended abruptly at the base of the neck. The rest of the body was white.

The staring eyes were yellow, small and completely round. The face itself was remarkably bony, with high cheekbones, a beak of a nose and a wide, almost lipless mouth. The tanned skin of the face was almost leathery in texture but that, thought Hardin, was due to constant exposure to wind and sun.

"Odd," said Hardin, "he . . . it . . . has what we would call a nice, long moustache, but the top of the head is absolutely hairless. . . ."

"Not shaved," observed Gearhardt. "But there's plenty of eyebrow. Both a sort of rusty red. Why?"

Hardin shook his head.

"Oh," Gearhardt said cheerfully, "we'll need a much greater sampling before we can draw any conclusions. But they *are* very like us."

"And very different."

Gearhardt straightened with a sigh. "I feel a quite unscientific dislike for them," he said slowly. "I keep remembering what their ancestors did to the ones who built and lived in this great city. That's right, isn't it? This kind were the destroyers?"

"Yes. The Indians who evaded the Reservation . . . the Mongols who never tasted defeat . . . the Vandals who never went soft." He touched a bowed leg with the toe of his boot. "See what generations in the saddle have developed?"

"I'd like to see the results of a full-scale autopsy," Gearhardt said, "but —"

"No chance for that, I'm afraid. We can't take them with us, sir — we've got to hurry!"

"Yes . . . I know."

But Hardin didn't move. He looked at Gearhardt, cleared his throat and said finally, "Will you tell them, sir — the Administrator and the others — about what I think?"

"I will not," Gearhardt's voice was incisive. "*You* will, Leslie. It's time we listened to a historian!"

The second scout ship was somewhat larger than the first, so its messhall was the scene of the night's council. But the meeting was still a tightly squeezed affair; only the top echelons of each major department of pertinent knowledge were present. It was an unhappy meeting. And, despite the Administrator's occasional attempts to assert order, a very noisy one.

Hardin sat quietly beside Gearhardt and let the babble flow over his head. He and the archeologist had returned just as the third as-

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sault wave had come within fifteen meters of the gun pit. Not until the plain was heaped high with paralyzed bodies did the enemy retire.

Now, they were camped sullenly just at the limit of the ship's lights, waiting. Hardin guessed that all the stunned casualties had recovered by now; even the effects of the paral-gas should have worn off and the complement of the foe should now be at full strength. He reflected worriedly that the same couldn't be said of his ammunition . . . he'd have to use the gun on them next time.

Hardin thought of them, in their camp out there, banging their drums, blowing their horns. . . . Thanks to Stiegesen, he had a pretty good idea of what that camp looked like. Stiegesen had crawled in from the east, saluted, and stood patiently while Hardin slowly and methodically chewed his neck off for gross dereliction of duty, deserting his post while under fire and divers other heinous military sins of omission and commission. Then Stieg had made his report and he and the captain had developed the film in the lieutenant's spy camera.

A sudden silence brought Hardin's mind to the present. The arguments and counter-arguments had ground to a stop as their proponents got tired of saying the same things over and over again. After a short period of quiet a botanist said, "I suppose we can try one of the other three continents?"

"My dear Healy," the Administrator's voice was patiently weary, "both ships have passed over the other land masses. On them we saw similar ruined cities. We didn't get low enough for a good look at animal life but I think, in this instance, we can reason from the particular to the general and assume the other continents have — ah, tribes like this one, possessing the same bellicosity and — ah, irrationality."

"I agree!" snapped Tresco. "We've no choice. We've simply got to establish peaceable contact with this group — or give up!"

The ensuing silence was broken by Gearhardt. The old man cleared his throat and said, "Mr. Administrator?"

Jeltenko smiled warmly and said, "Ah, Doctor, I was wondering when we were going to hear from you. Surely you have some wise counsel for us?"

"I haven't," Gearhardt replied. "But one of our number has — you haven't heard from him yet, either." Hardin was startled by the sharp ring of authority in the old man's voice. "I refer to Captain Hardin. He's got something to tell you and I suggest you listen to him!"

Hardin felt all eyes upon him . . . eyes signaling irritation, curiosity, impatient contempt. . . .

Administrator Jeltenko said very courteously, "Captain Hardin? To be sure. What have you to tell us, Captain?"

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Hardin got up and stood in front of his pushed-back chair, his legs spread wide apart, his hands clasped behind his back. This is it, he thought wryly, they'll listen to me now, or see some killing in the morning. But when he spoke, he kept all belligerence out of his voice.

"You won't like much of what I'll say," he said slowly. "And certainly, a great deal of it will be completely foreign to your thinking. But I'd like you to hear me out."

"I assure you that you will be heard, Captain," murmured the Administrator. "Please continue." He leaned back in his chair, ran a hand through his white mane and smiled his benevolent smile.

"Thank you, sir. The first thing I'd like to tell you is this: You will never establish any sort of peaceable relationship with the natives of this planet."

That jolted them. Tresco was the first to recover. "Ah," he sneered, "the military mind."

Hardin looked at him.

"Let me explain the military mind to you, Doctor Tresco," he said quietly. "The military, as it is constituted today, was established in 2117 for the protection of society. To do the job properly, it had to possess two things: One, an absolute selfless, yet *intelligent* devotion to its duty. Two, to protect society, it had to know society. To know society, it had to know history. Doctor Tresco, there are differences between the military mind and — let us say — your own: possibly a greater sense of duty — inbred, of course — and very definitely a vaster knowledge of history."

Tresco flushed and stared down at the table.

"There will be no more interruptions, gentlemen," said the Administrator.

"The essential thing is," Hardin continued, "I know history. I know the three thousand year period which we call the conflict era in man's cultural development . . . . that period of violence and bloodshed about which you gentlemen know nothing."

"Pardon me, Captain," Jeltenko broke in very smoothly. "I, myself, don't quite see the connection between a knowledge of the tragic era of Terran man's development and the situation that confronts us here — Terran man's first contact with an extra-Solar race."

"Parallels, sir."

"Parallels?"

"Certainly. Those people out there," he gestured toward the bow of the ship, "are human. The two bodies Doctor Gearhardt and I examined this afternoon prove that. Archelogical evidence indicates that the beings who built the abandoned city were also human. But obviously not of the same culture pattern as ours . . . ah, besiegers. Right, Doctor?"

Gearhardt nodded.

"I see." The Administrator drummed his fingers on the table.

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"Let me see if I understand you, Captain. You are saying that our besiegers, as you so aptly put it, are at a stage of development that corresponds with a similar, *known* level of Terran man's development. If we can ascertain the proper stage, we'll be able to understand them?"

"Oh, I know the stage," Hardin said casually. Eyebrows went up all around the table. "As soon as I explain it to you, you'll all understand them, completely. But they'll never understand us — they don't want to."

Ignoring the startled gasps, Hardin went on. "This afternoon Lieutenant Stiegesen risked his life to get a good look at the enemy encampment." At the word *enemy* Tresco ahemed loudly, but said nothing. "I'll remark in passing that the lieutenant has been reprimanded for disobeying orders. He will also be commended for exceptional devotion to duty. For he crawled through the grass, right to the edge of their encampment and got a very good look at these people's way of life."

He paused, looked slowly at each face in turn.

"I'll show his report and pictures, later," he said. "Here's the gist of it and as I give it to you, please remember the phrase I just used. We're not up against a hostile army so much as a hostile *way of life*. A complete community is out there, arrayed against us. Men and older boys are mounted and make up the fighting force. Women and smaller children follow that mounted corps in carts, drawn by four-legged beasts the size of our ponies. The females of both the six- and four-legged types give a lactic-seeming fluid which the people drink. Their staple diet is flesh, probably of wild animals and of the two species they've domesticated. As they're all dressed in skins and furs, we may presume they hunt a lot."

Hardin took a deep breath, then went on.

"Stiegesen reports that the tents and carts are arranged in concentric circles around an open area. In the center of that area he saw a pole with Doctor Struthers-Stote's head on it."

A whispering sigh drifted around the table.

"Barbarians," said someone.

"By our standards," nodded Hardin. "Well, gentlemen, that's about all. . . . Stiegesen says their sole artifacts seem to be their weapons, their carts, their riding and kitchen gear. As clothes and tents are merely skins stitched together, I'd hardly call them items of manufacture. In short, these are a roving people, living off the land — *uncultivated* land.

"Gentlemen, they're nomads."

Hardin waited. No one said anything.

"Good God!" he cried. "Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Startled, they looked from one to the other. Jeltenko frowned and the

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quiet of his tone was a reproof. "I'm sure that most of us know what Terran nomads were, Captain. A migratory people, just as you've described these Wolfians. If these are nomads of the Terran type, that still doesn't explain their hostility."

There were muttered noises of agreement. Hardin suddenly realized one leg was stiff. He shifted his stance, then took out his cigaret case. The smoke irritated his dry throat but, at the same time, eased his tension.

"More history, gentlemen. You've tried to forget about the wars of man's past. You're quite right in thinking that most of those wars were pretty indecent and unnecessary affairs. But our history, recorded and unrecorded, is marked by one ever-recurring, *inescapable* conflict — the violent, no-holds-barred struggle to the death between the nomad and the town-dweller."

"Inescapable?" asked Tresco.

"Yes, Doctor. The nomad has always demonstrated a deep-seated hatred for the man who has stopped, built himself a permanent shelter and begun to till the soil. Part of this, I think, is purely psychological: the contempt of the free rover for the . . . well, the stick-in-the-mud. Another part — and Doctor Gearhardt shares this opinion — is the nomad's subconscious awareness that the town dweller will eventually destroy the ecology that gives the nomad life."

"That makes sense," Healy, the botanist, said. "A people dependent on grazing can't exist in a world of leveled forests and plowed fields."

"Well," said Tresco, "now that we know what we're up against, we should take steps to remedy the matter."

The Administrator nodded.

"But you can't!" cried Hardin. "The situation is forever irremediable! This conflict has been going on for thousands of years — apparently not only in our system, but in this one — very likely in others!" He dashed the cigaret into an ash-tray. "For God's sake, gentlemen! What do you suppose happened to the city behind us? Don't you think they were a peaceful, highly intelligent people? Of course they were — and they were overcome in a day. Their city was taken by the nomads, its builders slaughtered, and the city looted of what they wanted. And what did they want? Not the city itself — as some of you have seen, that's almost intact. No, they wanted its metal for their weapons; likely they also took jewels or similar personal adornments . . . assuredly they kept some of the urban children alive for the increase of the nomadic tribe. That's the pattern of this world — victorious nomads!"

"That is right," nodded Gearhardt.

"At times they were victorious in our own world," Hardin swept on. "The white Vandals and Goths shattered the western Roman empire.

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The sophisticated culture of Roman Italy was almost totally obliterated by the Goths and took centuries to reassert itself. Then later the brown Mongols overran Europe and Asia for over two hundred years. They were not absorbed, they were defeated and scattered finally . . . but not until the urban dwellers of Russia and north China had received an evolutionary setback that took them centuries to overcome."

"It is a pattern that cannot be altered," Gearhardt said. "A pattern that we have been instructed to ignore. But here it is again."

"If you want to make contact with those drum-beaters out there," Hardin said, "give them the metal of our ships for their weapons . . . and our heads for their poles."

Administrator Jeltenko coughed and Dr. Healy automatically touched his neck.

Jeltenko said, "You think there's no doubt in their minds that we're urban?"

"What do *you* think, sir?"

"We pretty well proved to them we were, of course." He sighed. "One more question: Why aren't they afraid of us?"

"Because we didn't kill a few in the first attack!"

"I suppose so. . . . They thought the film sequence showing our culture abandoning war was . . . *funny*."

"That was like talking morality to a naughty three-year-old!"

The Administrator sighed again. "I think you've made your point, Captain, and I'm grateful. It seems that we scientists don't know everything, do we?"

Tresco started to speak, grunted, cleared his throat, then started again. "We've made a grave mistake in ignoring history. We've made another in failing to integrate our soldiers — our defenders — into our intellectual life." He chewed violently on his cigar.

Hardin smiled at him. "Thank you, Doctor," he said quietly.

Tresco met his eyes, smiled around his cigar and said, "No fool like a fat fool, is there? So much more of him, eh?"

"I shall do everything in my power to correct both situations," said Jeltenko. "Meantime, Captain, what do you suggest we do now?"

"Mmmn," said Hardin. He grinned suddenly. "You won't like this, but . . . anyway: The rumor's probably got around among them that we do possess killing weapons. But most of them won't believe it, so they'll keep up the attacks until we use the gun and knock off a few hundred of them —"

"No!" Save for the smiling Gearhardt the chorus of dissent was unanimous.

"I said you wouldn't like it. Had we used the gun in the first place, killed a few, we might have overawed the rest and established some kind of uneasy truce. Too late for that now. We can only drive them off by killing them."

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"And what will we accomplish by that?" snapped the Administrator.

"There's the rub," replied Hardin. "You'll have then only the ground you can hold by force of arms. What will you do with it?" No one answered him. "You can settle that ground and death will be lurking at its borders, ready for the first settler that gets careless. That's the defensive way . . . and it's a nerve-wracking way — not my idea of the good life at all!"

"This is a mission of contact, not settlement!" cried the Administrator.

"Or," Hardin ignored the interruption, "your settlement can take the offensive — introduce some factor that would upset these nomad's ecology. The western American urbanites did that. They defeated the Plains Indians by butchering the buffalo which was the Indians' commissary."

"My dear Captain!" Jeltenko's voice was an angry rasp. "You know the United Solar Nations need no new lands! This is a friendly mission, a social visit, if you like — it is not a would-be conquest!"

All heads nodded violently.

Hardin still smiled. "I understand, sir," he said easily. Believe me, I didn't imagine for one second that you'd entertain either of those possibilities. I was just narrowing it down to the only thing this kind of expedition *can* do."

"And that is?"

"To leave."

There was utter silence in the room. Gearhardt doodled aimlessly on a pad in front of him, Tresco forgot to chew his cigar. The Administrator slowly lifted his handsome, white-maned head and forced himself to meet Hardin's level stare.

"You mean . . . go back . . . admit defeat?"

"This is no question of defeat, sir. Is a man defeated when an earthquake hurls him to the ground?"

"But *our* hopes . . . *our* plans . . . the millions spent in building and equipping the ship . . . Generations have lived for this moment! And —"

"And the moment isn't what we thought it would be. That's all. There are other systems, there will be other ships.'"

"What do you think, gentlemen?" the Administrator pleaded.

Tresco made a noise that was somewhere between a grunt and a sigh. "We buried Struthers-Stote this morning," he muttered. "I guess that's our answer. . . ."

"Heads on poles," muttered someone.

"Do we go, then?" the Administrator said dully.

"There are other systems, as the Captain said," Gearhardt's voice was very gentle.

Others nodded.

"Very well." The Administrator made a gallant recovery, when he spoke again, it was in his old, incisive tones. "We shall leave at once." He stood up, smiled at Hardin. "Cap-

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tain, our debt to you is very great. Before we set off from Earth again, I'll hope to read some of your books . . . ah, the forbidden ones!"

"There is an opportunity here," Hardin said musingly. As the Administrator's eyes lightened, he added hurriedly, "Oh, not for us — for our descendants."

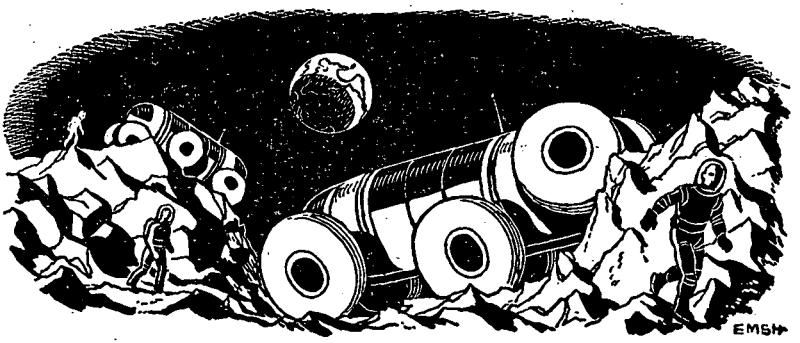
"How's that?" asked Tresco.

"In our system, the nomads finally lost out to the urbanites. We cannot even guess at the nature of a nomad civilization evolved as far beyond the Vandals as we have progressed beyond the Romans. But here the wanderers have won a total victory. It should be very interesting to come back in a thousand years and see if they have remained static — or evolved into another type. . . ."

The two survey ships blasted off to rejoin the *Messenger* and the roar of their going startled the Wolfians from their sleep. They sat up in their blankets and sleepily watched the rocket trails fade out in the night's black depths. A few sentries trotted over to the invaders' campsite to see if the strange fools had left anything of value to mark their passing.

But most of them just lay back again, laughed a little, then snuggled closer to their women and slept.

All, that is, save sixteen-year-old Ghar Gharslan, who lay awake a long time trying to decide whether it was more fun to ride on the back of a galloping six-legged drzhinye or inside of a flying steel bird. . . .



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Richard Matheson is chiefly noted as the Young Master of powerful emotional impact in science-fantasy; but he can also, upon occasion, be one of the brightest and funniest farceurs in the business, as you may remember from SRL Ad (*F&SF, April, 1952*). *Now he demonstrates that the compendious novel* I AM LEGEND *did not exhaust his knowledge of vampires, as he adds to our store of data on those and other beings in a hilariously grisly tale which could be illustrated only by Charles Addams.*

The Funeral

by RICHARD MATHESON

MORTON SILKLINE WAS IN HIS OFFICE musing over floral arrangements for the Beaumont obsequies when the chiming strains of "I am Crossing o'er the Bar to Join the Choir Invisible" announced an entrant into Clooney's Cut-Rate Catafalque.

Blinking meditation from his liver-colored eyes, Silkline knit his fingers to a placid clasp, then settled back against the sable leather of his chair, a smile of funereal welcome on his lips. Out in the stillness of the hallway, footsteps sounded on the muffling carpet, moving with a leisured pace and, just before the tall man entered, the desk clock buzzed a curt acknowledgment to 7:30.

Rising as if caught in the midst of a tête-à-tête with death's bright angel, Morton Silkline circled the glossy desk on whispering feet and extended one flaccid-fingered hand.

"Ah, good evening, sir," he dulceted, his smile a precise compendium of sympathy and welcome, his voice a calculated drip of obeisance.

The man's handshake was cool and bone-cracking but Silkline managed to repress reaction to a momentary flicker of agony in his cinnamon eyes.

"Won't you be seated?" he murmured, fluttering his bruised hand toward The Grieved One's chair.

"Thank you," said the man, his voice a baritoned politeness as he seated himself, unbuttoning the front of his velvet-collared overcoat and placing his dark homburg on the glass top of the desk.

"My name is Morton Silkline," Silkline offered as he re-circled to his chair, settling on the cushion like a diffident butterfly.

"Asper," said the man.

"May I say that I am proud to

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meet you, Mister Asper?" Silkline purred.

"Thank you," said the man.

"Well, now," Silkline said, getting down to the business of bereavement, "what can Clooney's do to ease your sorrow?"

The man crossed his dark-trousered legs. "I should like," he said, "to make arrangements for a funeral service."

Silkline nodded once with an I-am-here-to-succor smile.

"Of course," he said, "you've come to the right place, sir." His gaze elevated a few inches beyond the pale. "*When loved ones lie upon that lonely couch of everlasting sleep*," he recited, "*let Clooney draw the coverlet.*"

His gaze returned and he smiled with a modest subservience. "Mrs. Clooney," he said, "made that up. We like to pass it along to those who come to us for comfort."

"Very nice," the man said. "Extremely poetic. But to details: I'd like to engage your largest parlor."

"I see," Silkline answered, restraining himself, only with effort, from the rubbing together of hands. "That would be our Eternal Rest Room."

The man nodded affably. "Fine. And I would also like to buy your most expensive casket."

Silkline could barely restrain a boyish grin. His cardiac muscle flexing vigorously, he forced back folds of sorrowful solicitude across his face.

"I'm sure," he said, "that can be effected."

"With gold trimmings?" the man said.

"Why . . . *yes*," said Director Silkline, clicking audibly as he swallowed. "I'm certain that Clooney's can satisfy your every need in this time of grievous loss. Naturally —" His voice slipped a jot from the condoling to the fiduciary "— it will entail a bit more expenditure than might, otherwise, be —"

"The cost is of no importance," said the man, waving it away. "I want only the best of everything."

"It will be so, sir, it *will* be so," declared a fervent Morton Silkline.

"Capital," said the man.

"Now," Silkline went on, briskly, "will you be wishing our Mr. Mossmound to deliver his sermon *On Crossing The Great Divide* or have you a denominational ceremony in mind?"

"I think not," said the man, shaking his head, thoughtfully. "A friend of mine will speak at the services."

"Ah," said Silkline, nodding, "I see."

Reaching forward, he plucked the gold pen from its onyx holder, then with two fingers of his left hand, drew out an application form from the ivory box on his desk top. He looked up with the accredited expression for the Asking of Painful Questions.

"And," he said, "what is the name of the deceased, may I ask?"

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"Asper," said the man.

Silkline glanced up, smiling politely. "A relative?" he inquired.

"Me," said the man.

Silkline's laugh was a faint coughing.

"I beg your pardon?" he said. "I thought you said —"

"*Me*," the man repeated.

"But, I don't —"

"You see," the man explained, "I never had a proper going off. It was catch-as-catch-can, you might say; all improvised. Nothing — how shall I put it? — *tasty*." The man shrugged his wide shoulders. "I always regretted that," he said. "I always intended to make up for it."

Morton Silkline had returned the pen to its holder with a decisive jabbing of the hand and was on his feet, pulsing with a harsh distemper.

"Indeed, sir," he commented. "In*deed*."

The man looked surprised at the vexation of Morton Silkline.

"I —" he began.

"I am as fully prepared as the next fellow for a trifling badinage," Silkline interrupted, "but *not* during work hours. I think you fail to realize, sir, just where you are. This is Clooney's, a much respected ossuary; not a place for trivial joking or —"

He shrank back and stared, open-mouthed, at the black-garbed man who was suddenly on his feet, eyes glittering with a light most unseemly.

"This," the man said, balefully, "is not a joke."

"Is not —" Silkline could manage no more.

"I came here," said the man, "with a most serious purpose in mind." His eyes glowed now like cherry-bright coals. "And I expect this purpose to be gratified," he said. "Do you understand?"

"I —"

"On Tuesday next," the man continued, "at 8:30 P.M., my friends and I will arrive here for the service. You will have everything prepared by then. Full payment will be made directly following the exequies. Are there any questions?"

"I —"

"I need hardly remind you," said the man, picking up his homburg, "that this affair is of the utmost importance to me." He paused potently before allowing his voice to sink to a forbidding basso profundo. "I expect all to go well."

Bowing a modicum from the waist, the man turned and moved in two regal strides across the office, pausing a moment at the door.

"Uh . . . one additional item," he said. "That mirror in the foyer . . . *remove it*. And, I might add, any others that my friends and I might chance upon during our stay in your parlors."

The man raised one gray-gloved hand. "And now goodnight."

When Morton Silkline reached the hall, his customer was just flapping out a small window. Quite suddenly, Morton Silkline found the floor.

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They arrived at 8:30, conversing as they entered the foyer of Clooney's to be met by a tremble-legged Morton Silkline about whose eyes hung the raccoon circles of sleepless nights.

"Good evening," greeted the tall man, noting, with a pleased nod, the absence of the wall mirror.

"Good —" was the total of Silkline's wordage.

His vocal cords went slack and his eyes, embossed with daze, moved from figure to figure in the tall man's coterie — the gnarl-faced hunchback whom Silkline heard addressed as Ygor; the peak-hatted crone upon whose ceremented shoulder a black cat crouched; the hulking hairy-handed man who clicked yellow teeth together and regarded Silkline with markedly more than casual eyes; the waxen-featured little man who licked his lips and smiled at Silkline as though he possessed some inner satisfaction; the half-dozen men and women in evening dress, all cherry-eyed and -lipped and — Silkline cringed — superbly toothed.

Silkline hung against the wall, mouth a circular entrance way, hands twitching feebly at his sides as the chatting assemblage passed him by, headed for the Eternal Rest Room.

"Join us," the tall man said.

Silkline stirred fitfully from the wall and stumble-wove an erratic path down the hallway, eyes still saucer-round with stupor.

"I trust," the man said pleasantly, "everything is well prepared."

"Oh," Silkline squeaked. "Oh — oh, yes."

"Sterling," said the man.

When the two of them entered the room, the others were grouped in an admiring semicircle about the casket.

"Is good," the hunchback was muttering to himself. "Is good box."

"Aye, be that a casket or be that a casket, Delphinia?" cackled the ancient crone and Delphinia replied, "Mrrrr*ow*."

While the others nodded, smiling felicitous smiles and murmuring, "Ah. Ah."

Then one of the evening-dressed women said, "Let Ludwig see," and the semicircle split open so the tall man could pass.

He ran his long fingers over the gold work on the sides and top of the casket, nodding appreciatively. "Splendid," he murmured, voice husky with emotion. "Quite splendid. Just what I always wanted."

"You picked a beauty, lad," said a tall white-haired gentleman.

"Well, try it on fer size!" the chuckling crone declared.

Smiling boyishly, Ludwig climbed into the casket and wriggled into place. "A perfect fit," he said, contentedly.

"Master look good," mumbled Ygor, nodding crookedly. "Look good in box."

Then the hairy-handed man demanded they begin because he had

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an appointment at 9:15, and everyone hurried to their chairs.

"Come, duck," said the crone, waving a scrawny hand at the ossified Silkline. "Sit by my side. I likes the pretty boys, I do, eh, Delphinia?" Delphinia said, "Mrrrrrow."

"Please, Jenny," Ludwig Asper asked her, opening his eyes a moment. "Be serious. You know what this means to me."

The crone shrugged. "Aye. Aye," she muttered, then pulled off her peaked hat and fluffed at dank curls as the zombie-stiff Silkline quivered into place beside her, aided by the guiding hand of the little waxen-faced man.

"Hello, pretty boy," the crone whispered, leaning over and jabbing a spear-point elbow into Silkline's ribs.

Then the tall white-haired gentleman from the Carpathian zone rose and the service began.

"Good friends," said the gentleman, "we have gathered ourselves within these bud-wreathed walls to pay homage to our comrade, Ludwig Asper, whom the pious and unyielding fates have chosen to pluck from existence and place within that bleak sarcophagus of all eternity."

"*Ci-gît*," someone murmured; "*Chant du cygne*," another. Ygor wept and the waxen-featured little man, sitting on the other side of Morton Silkline, leaned over to murmur, "*Tasty*," but Silkline wasn't sure it was in reference to the funeral address.

"And thus," the gentleman from Carpathia went on, "we collect our bitter selves about this, our comrade's bier; about this litter of sorrow, this cairn, this cromlech, this unhappy tumulus—"

"*Clearer, clearer*," demanded Jenny, stamping one pointy-toed and petulant shoe. "Mrrrrow," said Delphinia and the crone winked one blood-laced eye at Silkline who shrank away only to brush against the little man who gazed at him with berry eyes and murmured once again, "*Tasty*."

The white-haired gentleman paused long enough to gaze down his royal nose at the crone. Then he continued, "— this mastaba, this sorrowing tope, this ghat, this dread dokhma—"

"What he say?" asked Ygor, pausing in mid-sob. "What, what?"

"This ain't no declamation tourney, lad," the crone declared. "Keep it crisp, I say."

Ludwig raised his head again, a look of pained embarrassment on his face. "Jenny," he said. "*Please*."

"Aaaah . . . *toad's teeth!*" snapped the crone jadedly, and Delphinia moaned.

"*Requiescas in pace*, dear brother," the Count went on, testily. "The memory of you shall not perish with your untimely sepulture. You are, dear friend, not so much out of the game as playing on another field."

At which the hairy-handed man rose and hulked from the room with the guttural announcement, "*Go*,"

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and Silkline felt himself rendered an icicle as he heard a sudden padding of clawed feet on the hallway rug and a baying which echoed back along the walls.

"Ullgate says he has a dinner appointment," the little man asided with a bright-eyed smile. Silkline's chair creaked with shuddering.

The white-haired gentleman stood tall and silent, his red eyes shut, his mouth tight-lipped with aristocratic pique.

"*Count*," pleaded Ludwig. "Please."

"Am I to endure these vulgar calumnies?" asked the Count. "These —"

"Well, *la-de-da*," crooned Jenny to her cat.

"Silence, woman!" roared the Count, his head disappearing momentarily in a white, trailing vapor, then reappearing as he gained control.

Ludwig sat up, face a twist of aggravation. "Jenny," he declared, "I think you'd better leave."

"You think to throw old Jenny of Boston out?" the crone challenged. "Well, you got a think that's coming then!"

And, as a shriveling Silkline watched, the crone slapped on her pointed hat and sprouted minor lightning at the fingertips. A snail-backed Delphinia bristled ebony hairs as the Count stepped forward, hand outstretched, to clamp onto the crone's shoulder, then stiffened in mid-stride as sizzling fire ringed him.

"Haa!" crowed Jenny while a horror-stricken Silkline gagged, "My *rug!*"

"Jen-*ny!*" Ludwig cried, clambering out. The crone gestured and all the flowers in the room began exploding like popcorn.

"*No-o*," moaned Silkline as the curtains flared and split. Chairs were overthrown. The Count bicarbonated to a hissing stream of white which flew at Jenny — who flung up her arms and vanished, cat and all, in an orange spume as the air grew thick with squeaks and rib-winged flapping.

Just before the bulbous-eyed Morton Silkline toppled forward, the waxen-faced man leaned over, smiling toothfully, squeezed the Director's numbed arm and murmured, "*Tasty*."

Then Silkline was at one with the rug.

Morton Silkline slumped in his sable-leathered chair, still twitching slightly even though a week had passed since the nerve-splitting event. On his desk lay the note that Ludwig Asper had left pinned to his unconscious chest.

Sir, it read. *Accept, in addition to this bag of gold* (*which I trust will cover all costs*) *my regrets that full decorum was not effected by the guests at my funeral. For, save for that, the entire preparation was most satisfactory to me.*

Silkline put down the note and grazed a loving touch across the

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hill of glinting coins on his desk. Through judicious inquiry, he had gleaned the information that a connection in Mexico (namely, a cosmetician nephew in Carillo's Cut-Rate Catacomb) could safely dispose of the gold at mutual profit. All things considered, the affair had not been really as bad as all —

Morton Silkline looked up as something entered his office.

He would have chosen to leap back screaming and vanish in the flowered pattern of the wallpaper but he was too petrified. Once more gape-mouthed, he stared at the huge, tentacled, ocher-dripping shapelessness that weaved and swayed before him.

"A friend," it said politely, "recommended you to me."

Silkline sat bug-eyed for a lengthy moment but then his twitching hand accidentally touched the gold again. And he found strength.

"You've come," he said, breathing through his mouth, "to the right place — uh . . . *sir. Pomps* —" He swallowed mightily and braced himself "— *for all circumstances.*"

He reached for his pen, blowing away the yellow-green smoke which was beginning to obscure the office.

"Name of the deceased?" he asked, businesslike.

1980 Overtures

The earth still turns, though slightly singed.
The Muties, mystified,
Attempt the customs of the past,
But G.U. tracts cannot be classed
In two groups, plainly recognized.

The atomized society
Sets waterheads at loggerheads
With pinheads of propriety.

The best laid eggs of cock and hen,
The last laid genes of mice and men,
Gang aft agley.

The symbols $\overset{+}{\underset{+}{\bigcirc}}$ and $\overset{+}{\underset{+}{\bigcirc}}$ have changed —

The bomb has blown them all away —
Where is the SEX of yesterday?

WINONA McCLINTIC

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For this latest entry in F&SF's department of historical discoveries, I am indebted to that fine ballad singer and storyteller, Lee Hays. Everyone knows the name and reputation of Washington Irving; but Mr. Hays, bless him, goes a step further: he reads *Irving, and thereby discovered this fascinating and forgotten item — one of the earliest (indeed, possibly* the *earliest) of accounts of the Invasion of Earth. When Washington Irving wrote his second and most celebrated book,* A HISTORY OF NEW YORK FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD TO THE END OF THE DUTCH DYNASTY *"by Diedrich Knickerbocker," in 1809, he found — as so many writers have discovered only in the past few years — that the most savage and cogent attack upon the institutions of his own society could be phrased as an interplanetary story; and Chapter V of Book I of the Knickerbocker* HISTORY *(somewhat condensed here for today's more impatient readers) is not only important incunabular s.f. satire — it is still, after a century and a half, pointed criticism and wryly funny entertainment.*

The Conquest by the Moon

by WASHINGTON IRVING

WHAT RIGHT HAD THE FIRST DISCOVERERS of America to land and take possession of a country, without first gaining the consent of its inhabitants, or yielding them an adequate compensation for their territory? — a question which has withstood many fierce assaults, and has given much distress of mind to multitudes of kind-hearted folk. And indeed, until it be totally vanquished, and put to rest, the worthy people of America can by no means enjoy the soil they inhabit, with clear right and title, and unsullied consciences.

The first source of right, by which property is acquired in a country, is DISCOVERY. For as all mankind have an equal right to any thing, which has never before been appropriated, so any nation, that discovers an uninhabited country, and takes possession thereof, is considered as enjoying full property, and absolute, unquestionable empire therein.

This proposition being admitted, it follows clearly, that the Europeans who first visited America, were the real discoverers of the same; nothing being necessary to the establishment

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of this fact, but simply to prove that it was totally uninhabited by man. This would at first appear to be a point of some difficulty, for it is well known, that this quarter of the world abounded with certain animals, that walked erect on two feet, had something of the human countenance, uttered certain unintelligible sounds, very much like language, in short, had a marvellous resemblance to human beings.

But the zealous and enlightened fathers, who accompanied the discoverers, plainly proved (and as there were no Indian writers arose on the other side, the fact was considered as fully admitted and established) that the two-legged race of animals before mentioned were mere cannibals, detestable monsters, and many of them giants — which last description of vagrants have, since the times of Gog, Magog, and Goliath, been considered as outlaws, and have received no quarter in either history, chivalry, or song.

This right of discovery being fully established, we now come to the next, which is the right acquired by CULTIVATION. Now it is notorious, that the savages knew nothing of agriculture, when first discovered by the Europeans, but lived a most vagabond, disorderly, unrighteous life, — rambling from place to place, and prodigally rioting upon the spontaneous luxuries of nature, without tasking her generosity to yield them any thing more; whereas it has been most unquestionably shown, that Heaven intended the earth should be ploughed and sown, and manured, and laid out into cities, and towns, and farms, and country seats, and pleasure grounds, and public gardens, all which the Indians knew nothing about — therefore, they did not improve the talents Providence had bestowed on them — therefore, they were careless stewards — therefore, they had no right to the soil — therefore, they deserved to be exterminated.

It is true, the savages might plead that they drew all the benefits from the land which their simple wants required — they found plenty of game to hunt, which, together with the roots and uncultivated fruits of the earth, furnished a sufficient variety for their frugal repasts; — and that as Heaven merely designed the earth to form the abode, and satisfy the wants of man; so long as those purposes were answered, the will of Heaven was accomplished. — But this only proves how undeserving they were of the blessings around them — they were so much the more savages, for not having more wants; for knowledge is in some degree an increase of desires, and it is this superiority both in the number and magnitude of his desires, that distinguishes the man from the beast.

But a more irresistible right than either that I have mentioned, and one which will be the most readily admitted by my reader, provided he be blessed with bowels of charity and philanthropy, is the right ac-

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quired by CIVILIZATION. All the world knows the lamentable state in which these poor savages were found. Not only deficient in the comforts of life, but what is still worse, most piteously and unfortunately blind to the miseries of their situation. But no sooner did the benevolent inhabitants of Europe behold their sad condition than they immediately went to work to ameliorate and improve it. They introduced among them rum, gin, brandy, and the other comforts of life — and it is astonishing to read how soon the poor savages learned to estimate those blessings; they likewise made known to them a thousand remedies, by which the most inveterate diseases are alleviated and healed; and that they might comprehend the benefits and enjoy the comforts of these medicines, they previously introduced among them the diseases which they were calculated to cure.

But the most important branch of civilization, and which has most strenuously been extolled by the zealous and pious fathers of the Romish Church, is the introduction of the Christian faith. It was truly a sight that might well inspire horror, to behold these savages tumbling among the dark mountains of paganism, and guilty of the most horrible ignorance of religion. It is true, they neither stole nor defrauded; they were sober, frugal, continent, and faithful to their word; but though they acted right habitually, it was all in vain, unless they acted so from precept. The new comers, therefore, used every method to induce them to embrace and practise the true religion — except indeed that of setting them the example.

Here then are three complete and undeniable sources of right established, any one of which was more than ample to establish a property in the newly discovered regions of America. Now, so it has happened in certain parts of this delightful quarter of the globe, that the right of discovery has been so strenuously asserted — the influence of cultivation so industriously extended, and the progress of salvation and civilization so zealously prosecuted, that, what with their attendant wars, persecutions, oppressions, diseases and other partial evils that often hang on the skirts of great benefits — the savage aborigines have, somehow or another, been utterly annihilated — and this all at once brings me to a fourth right, which is worth all the others put together: the RIGHT BY EXTERMINATION, or in other words, the RIGHT BY GUNPOWDER.

But as argument is never so well understood by us selfish mortals as when it comes home to ourselves, and as I am particularly anxious that this question should be put to rest forever, I will suppose a parallel case, by way of arousing the candid attention of my readers.

Let us suppose, then, that the inhabitants of the moon, by astonish-

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ing advancement in science, and by profound insight into that lunar philosophy, the mere flickerings of which have of late years dazzled the feeble optics, and addled the shallow brains of the good people of our globe — let us suppose, I say, that the inhabitants of the moon, by these means, had arrived at such a command of their *energies*, such an enviable state of *perfectibility*, as to control the elements, and navigate the boundless regions of space. Let us suppose a roving crew of these soaring philosophers, in the course of an aerial voyage of discovery among the stars, should chance to alight upon this outlandish planet.

And here I beg my readers will not have the uncharitableness to smile, as is too frequently the fault of volatile readers, when perusing the grave speculations of philosophers. I am far from indulging in any sportive vein at present; nor is the supposition I have been making so wild as many may deem it. It has long been a very serious and anxious question with me, and many a time and oft, in the course of my overwhelming cares and contrivances for the welfare and protection of this my native planet, have I lain awake whole nights debating in my mind, whether it were most probable we should first discover and civilize the moon, or the moon discover and civilize our globe. Neither would the prodigy of sailing in the air and cruising among the stars be a whit more astonishing and incomprehensible to us, than was the European mystery of navigating floating castles, through the world of waters, to the simple natives. We have already discovered the art of coasting along the aerial shores of our planet, by means of balloons, as the savages had of venturing along their seacoasts in canoes; and the disparity between the former, and the aerial vehicles of the philosophers from the moon, might not be greater than that between the bark canoes of the savages, and the mighty ships of their discoverers.

To return then to my supposition — let us suppose that the aerial visitants I have mentioned, possessed of vastly superior knowledge to ourselves; that is to say, possessed of superior knowledge in the art of extermination — riding on hyppogriffs — defended with impenetrable armor — armed with concentrated sunbeams, and provided with vast engines, to hurl enormous moonstones: in short, let us suppose them, if our vanity will permit the supposition, as superior to us in knowledge, and consequently in power, as the Europeans were to the Indians, when they first discovered them. All this is very possible; it is only our self-sufficiency that makes us think otherwise; and I warrant the poor savages, before they had any knowledge of the white men, armed in all the terrors of glittering steel and tremendous gunpowder, were as perfectly convinced that they themselves were the wisest, the most vir-

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tuous, powerful, and perfect of created beings, as are, at this present moment, the lordly inhabitants of old England, the volatile populace of France, or even the self-satisfied citizens of this most enlightened republic.

Let us suppose, moreover, that the aerial voyagers, finding this planet to be nothing but a howling wilderness, inhabited by us, poor savages and wild beasts, shall take formal possession of it, in the name of his most gracious and philosophic excellency, the man in the moon. Finding, however, that their numbers are incompetent to hold it in complete subjection, on account of the ferocious barbarity of its inhabitants, they shall take our worthy President, the King of England, the Emperor of Hayti, the mighty Bonaparte, and the great King of Bantam, and returning to their native planet, shall carry them to court, as were the Indian chiefs led about as spectacles in the courts of Europe.

Then making such obeisance as the etiquette of the court requires, they shall address the puissant man in the moon, in, as near as I can conjecture, the following terms:

"Most serene and mighty Potentate, whose dominions extend as far as eye can reach, who rideth on the Great Bear, useth the sun as a looking-glass, and maintaineth unrivalled control over tides, madmen, and sea-crabs. We thy liege subjects have just returned from a voyage of discovery, in the course of which we have landed and taken possession of that obscure little dirty planet, which thou beholdest rolling at a distance. The five uncouth monsters, which we have brought into this august presence, were once very important chiefs among their fellow savages, who are a race of beings totally destitute of the common attributes of humanity; and differing in every thing from the inhabitants of the moon, inasmuch as they carry their heads upon their shoulders, instead of under their arms — have two eyes instead of one — are utterly destitute of tails, and of a variety of unseemly complexions, particularly of horrible whiteness — instead of pea-green.

"We have moreover found these miserable savages sunk into a state of the utmost ignorance and depravity, every man shamelessly living with his own wife, and rearing his own children, instead of indulging in that community of wives enjoined by the law of nature, as expounded by the philosophers of the moon. In a word, they have scarcely a gleam of true philosophy among them, but are, in fact, utter heretics, ignoramuses, and barbarians. Taking compassion, therefore, on the sad condition of these sublunary wretches, we have endeavored, while we remained on their planet, to introduce among them the light of reason — and the comforts of the moon. We have treated them to mouthfuls of moonshine,

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and draughts of nitrous oxide, which they swallowed with incredible voracity, particularly the females; and we have likewise endeavored to instil into them the precepts of lunar philosophy. We have insisted upon their renouncing the contemptible shackles of religion and common sense, and adoring the profound, omnipotent, and all perfect energy, and the ecstatic, immutable, immovable perfection. But such was the unparalleled obstinacy of these wretched savages, that they persisted in cleaving to their wives, and adhering to their religion, and absolutely set at naught the sublime doctrines of the moon, — nay, among other abominable heresies, they even went so far as blasphemously to declare, that this ineffable planet was made of nothing more nor less than green cheese!"

At these words, the great man in the moon (being a very profound philosopher) shall fall into a terrible passion, and possessing equal authority over things that do not belong to him, as did whilom his holiness the Pope, shall forthwith issue a formidable bull, specifying, "That, whereas a certain crew of Lunatics have lately discovered, and taken possession of a newly discovered planet called *the earth* — and that whereas it is inhabited by none but a race of two-legged animals that carry their heads on their shoulders instead of under their arms; cannot talk the lunatic language; have two eyes instead of one; are destitute of tails, and of a horrible whiteness, instead of pea-green — therefor, and for a variety of other excellent reasons, they are considered incapable of possessing any property in the planet they infest, and the right and title to it are confirmed to its original discoverers. — And furthermore, the colonists who are now about to depart to the aforesaid planet are authorized and commanded to use every means to convert these infidel savages from the darkness of Christianity, and make them thorough and absolute lunatics."

In consequence of this benevolent bull, our philosophic benefactors go to work with hearty zeal. They seize upon our fertile territories, scourge us from our rightful possessions, relieve us from our wives, and when we are unreasonable enough to complain, they will turn upon us and say, "Miserable barbarians! ungrateful wretches! have we not come thousands of miles to improve your worthless planet; have we not fed you with moonshine; have we not intoxicated you with nitrous oxide; does not our moon give you light every night, and have you the baseness to murmur, when we claim a pitiful return for all these benefits?"

But finding that we not only persist in absolute contempt of their reasoning and disbelief in their philosophy, but even go so far as daringly to defend our property, their patience shall be exhausted, and they shall resort to their superior

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powers of argument; hunt us with hyppogriffs, transfix us with concentrated sunbeams, demolish our cities with moon-stones; until having, by main force, converted us to the true faith, they shall graciously permit us to exist in the torrid deserts of Arabia, or the frozen regions of Lapland, there to enjoy the charms of lunar philosophy, in much the same manner as the reformed and enlightened savages of this country are kindly suffered to inhabit the inhospitable forests of the north, or the impenetrable wildernesses of South America.

Thus, I hope, I have clearly proved, and strikingly illustrated, the right of the early colonists to the possession of this country; and thus is this gigantic question completely vanquished.

Coming Next Month

The top feature of our next issue, on the stands in early April, will be a novelet by Poul Anderson — who is so versatile a writer (and so satisfactory in each of his aspects) that each story needs a separate description. The last Anderson novelet here was uproarious interplanetary farce (*Yo Ho Hoka!*, March, 1955); the one before that was serious sociological science fiction (*Ghetto*, May, 1954). The new one, *Time Patrol*, represents yet a third Anderson — the inimitable storyteller of sheer swashbuckling adventure, with one of the most exciting, ingenious and entertaining of modern time travel stories. There'll also be another feature novelet, J. T. McIntosh's picture of the intimate human side of galactic party-politics in *Eleventh Commandment*, and short stories (all new: this is one of our experimental non-reprint issues) by Charles Beaumont, James Blish and others, including the editor.

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Recently I made the severe mistake of describing Clark Ashton Smith as "surely the most venerable of F&SF's contributors — not so much in age as in practice of his craft." Mr. Smith, who began his professional career in 1910 at the age of seventeen, was the first to point out that this distinction of venerability belongs unquestionably to Lord Dunsany. Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron Dunsany, was born in 1878 and published a magnificent volume of fantasies, THE GODS OF PEGANA, *as early as 1905. Now, a full fifty years later, Dunsany still writes with charm, ingenuity, and a fluent ease which is the envy of younger rivals — and with striking modernity of concepts, as in this his newest tale, which deals delightfully with the latest electronic developments in the ancient science of exorcism.*

The Ghosts of the Heaviside Layer

by LORD DUNSANY

ON A FARM OF FIFTY THOUSAND acres a farmer had been eking out a precarious livelihood from sheep in the Karoo, until one day among stunted bushes and bright brown rocks he discovered gold. This brought him to London, as though gold naturally gravitated there, dragging him with it.

But this is not his story. It is the story of his son, Jan Nietjens, who though born in the Karoo, was too young to remember its spaces, its springboks and its koraans, and had for his earliest memories London streets and the sound of motorbuses; and sometimes a glimpse of lilac, which London shared with hills and valleys beyond, that he did not know. His mother died soon in London, missing something she could not explain, and finding the air there not of the kind that she was accustomed to breathe, which any chemist could have told her was an absurd belief. His father went on with the business into which his gold had dragged him, and a certain shrewdness he had in him prevented him from losing any of the wealth he had brought from Africa, though he never appreciably increased it, and never quite felt any more at home among streets than a lion feels in a zoo.

I think that the loss of the Karoo

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must have embittered him, without his ever quite knowing what he had lost or that he had been embittered; and his bitterness took the form of inflicting upon his son the whole weight of what was oppressing him. So he made him a clerk, determining to teach him from the very beginning the ways of business in the City, determining, as he said, that his son should have the thorough knowledge of business that he himself had lacked; not seeming to know that his real lack, with which all his nerves were tingling, was for the far horizons, the flat-topped hills and the diamond air of the Karoo. And so young Jan came to know the insides of offices as his father had known the outside of the world, and learned all that his father planned that he should learn and did not imagine another kind of life; for imagination is only the brilliant reflection of things seen, and he had seen nothing but the streets and offices of a city. And though his father might have guessed the Karoo was calling him, young Jan, who had inherited the same far call with his bones and his blood, could not even guess what it was for which he was yearning, and thought that the world was drab, only because he could not picture anything beyond offices.

With his father's shrewdness, which he had inherited as well as those dim yearnings, combined with a knowledge of business from its foundations, which his father had never had, he made himself useful in his father's lifetime; and, when the old man died, he attended so well to the half of his inheritance which the State allowed him to keep, that in ten years he was as rich as his father had been, and in ten years more he was so rich that there is almost nothing he might not have had, had he had the leisure to enjoy it; but he had no time for amusements. Nor had he had any time to marry. For besides being a member of the Stock Exchange and looking after the many investments his father had left him, he became a director of several companies. Sometimes he had planned trips to the country, and even dreamed of travel abroad; but the dates of board meetings were too close together, and his wealth with which he had hoped to take hold on affairs in the world's greatest city gripped him and held him there. And now he was in the forties.

Perhaps he would have remained in London as his father had done, had he not been sitting one bright Spring day at an open window of his club and seen a strange bird flying high over London, uttering a call that he did not know, and wondered where it was flying. More birds fly over London than Londoners know, and this one may have been a curlew flying eastwards to find some marshes. Whatever it was it started a wonder in Jan Nietjen's mind, and his thought followed the wonder. And what he thought was

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that there was a note of happiness in the cry of the travelling bird; and turning, possibly for the first time, from a means of happiness, which his father had invested and left to him, to happiness itself, the idea came to him that he would follow the curlew. Without tenacity he would never have made the fortune he now possessed, and now that the idea had come he worked at it. He had never had such an idea before, but only the vague longing that was in his blood. The idea was that, having money enough, he could do without any more and give up all his directorships and turn his back on London and find some place where the wind was free to roam over trees and grasses, and be free himself like the wind. So he went down into Kent, as the curlew had gone, and looked about him. And one day he came to a hazel wood before the bluebells were over, and, looking at the old boles of the hazels all in the hush of the wood, he felt that this was where he might find content, when, raising his eyes, he saw over the tops of the hazels the battlements of a queer old flint-built tower. The swallows had just arrived, and some were sailing above it. A curlew flying and the sight of a ruined tower may seem small things upon which to plan the course of a life; but from such trifles our thoughts arise, and where our thoughts fly we follow if we can, and are dully discontent when we cannot.

And so Nietjens bought the ruined castle whose tower he had seen over the hazel wood, and the wood itself and the country all round for a mile, and employed an architect to plaster and strengthen the walls and to fill in gaps worn by time or by some old siege, and to put on a roof and to put in floors and some wooden staircases and to carpet the old spiral staircases of stone; and in little more than a year there was a comfortable house where only owls and jackdaws had lived for so long. And that winter he resigned from all his directorates, and furnished his new house and engaged a cook and several servants, and one snowy day of December he moved in. The outer walls were a good three feet thick and not easily removed, and the architect had kept their line intact. But not only did the old castle frown over the woods and fields as it had frowned in the time of King Stephen, but a certain austere gloom of its early days seemed still to haunt its interior, for the architect had rebuilt in keeping with those old walls and worked under the influence of the Twelfth Century. So when Jan Nietjens settled down into a deep armchair in the big drawing room on that snowy night and looked up into the dimness among the rafters, he wondered if, new though they were, those rafters might not shelter old invisible things that had haunted the ancient walls, and if so what.

He was smoking a cigar after an

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early dinner, and the smoke as it wandered up sometimes seemed to be taking shapes. All he knew of ghosts was what his mother had told him of those that the Zulus knew, that drifted over the Karoo by night and that sometimes told of things that were to trouble the future, but only in whispers. In London there were no ghosts, but he did not know what they might have in the country. These were only wonderings, and were soon replaced in his mind by the logical reasoning of a level-headed financier. And yet they returned. Various influences were pulling at Nietjens: at one moment the house seemed damp with newness, at another clammy with whatever was weirdest of things that haunted the ages. And since the architect had evidently sided with those ancient things, and the walls all round him had watched the passage of eight centuries, there were two ancient influences pulling at him to one of modernity. Around him his carpet and chairs were of the reign of Elizabeth II; above, the high walls and the rafters hinted of Stephen. He tried to balance logic and wonder, and when he could not, realizing that he only knew London, he decided to have a talk with someone who had known the old castle before he ever laid hands on it. There was a man named Smidger, whom he called his gardener, but who was really a labourer whom he had employed to dig up the weeds from the fields in which he had decided to have a garden. Smidger had lived there all his life, and forebears of his had probably lived there forever; so that he should know something, reasoned Nietjens, of things that came out of the past, if any such things there were.

When Nietjens threw away the butt of his cigar there did not seem so many ghosts in the rafters, or whatever the invisible things might be that had sometimes lured his wonder. But he kept to his idea of having a talk with Smidger, and next morning he went to the weedy patch that was to be his garden and spoke to Smidger about the past and old legends. And for a while Smidger said little but Yes and Oh, and seemed to Nietjens very dull-witted; but he was quietly finding out what Nietjens wanted, and suspicious at first that he was trying to make a fool of him. But when this suspicion faded slowly away he began to talk, and to tell Nietjens some of the things that the country people knew about the old castle, which was nothing they got from history books and was not of things dead and done with, but only of what lingered on among those old walls into their own time, or at least the time of their grandmothers, things that were there still and with which their elders had been familiar, in fact ghosts.

What had only been a vague wonder when Nietjens gazed into the great height of his principal room

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on his first evening in the old castle became a definite fear of ghosts after his talk with Smidger. He came of a superstitious people, who in the great loneliness of the Karoo had sometimes found little other company than superstitions, and when he suddenly found himself in suitable surroundings, the superstitions that were in his blood flourished abundantly. That day the vicar called on him, and he was just the man that Nietjens wanted to see. They both talked at once of the history of the old castle, and it was very easy from that to turn the conversation to ghosts, and after a few minutes talk about them Nietjens came to the point. Could not the vicar exorcise a house?

"O yes," said the vicar. "Yes, certainly. The church can do that. At the same time, is it not possible that the queerness of this old place, and coming to it for the first time from London, and perhaps hearing the rather foolish tales that the country people tell round here, may have caused you, not to exaggerate the possibility of ghosts, but perhaps slightly to overestimate it?"

Then Nietjens saw that the cooperation of the vicar would be half-hearted and, whatever there might or might not be in exorcism, he knew enough about men's work to know that no half-hearted effort ever achieved anything.

That evening alone with his cigar in the big high room Nietjens imagined the ghosts among the rafters more clearly. He did not see them, or expect to, for he had learned as a child that spirits were invisible, not even to be seen when they whispered quite close by red campfires. But he felt they were there. He had hoped to feel what home was in this old castle, as he had never known it in a London flat. But he only felt an intruder among the ages, whose influences, whatever they were, were at home where he was a stranger. As the long evenings went by, he felt more and more sure of this, and though carefully noting what was cigar-smoke and what was imagination, he saw every now and then something in between the two that made him think that the spirits were taking visible shapes. It was only rarely he saw such things, and they vanished in less than a second; but they served to remind him. He readily understood it might all be imagination; but Christmas was drawing near, when the things that he feared, if there really were such things, were certain to be abroad, so far as all tales he had ever heard had told. Sitting in his armchair one evening he wondered what he should do. Should he ask a bishop to help where the vicar had failed? He did not know any bishop, but could surely get introduced. And then the idea came to him. Why not give science a chance? He had offered the job at first to the church, and the church had not seemed very keen. It was science's turn. He knew several scientists, and he got on to one

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on the telephone there and then; for the old castle was on the telephone. And he asked him to come and stay the night with him, to see his castle, and persuaded him to come the following day.

And the scientist arrived the next afternoon. Glayde was his name. Nietjens met him at the station and greeted him warmly, for the weight of imponderable things had increased their oppression of him the night before, and Glayde seemed to him something of what a search-party seems to one lost in untravelled lands. Yet he did not speak to him of his vague fear that inhabitants of the ages were peering at his intrusion upon their ancient haunt. He showed him instead his rooms, with their pictures and furniture, and his system of central heating, until it was time for dinner. And then he gave Glayde champagne and port, and later over the coffee forced a liqueur upon him, when they had gone to the big high room and were comfortable in their chairs, for he feared the scientist's scepticism. But when he hoped that the wine and liqueur had done their mellow work, Nietjens told some of the tales that his gardener had told him of those who had once lived where they now sat, and that haunted the old walls still. He told the tales as amusing examples of what country people believed, and as less and less amusing as he went on; till, perhaps without noticing it himself, he was telling the tales of Smidger as though they were local news. And from the tales of Smidger Nietjens came to an account of his talk with the vicar. Glayde had not spoken yet, but sat quietly listening, smoking a cigar as Nietjens was doing. And encouraged by his silence and perhaps emboldened by the champagne and port, which he also had had, he told Glayde how the vicar had disappointed him and, when his guest looked sympathetic, he blurted out, "Can science not help?"

"Certainly," replied Glayde. "Science can do everything he can. What is it you want exorcised?"

Then Nietjens spoke openly of the consciousness that he had that up among those rafters near the top of the high walls, to which puffs of smoke were wandering slowly from their cigars, there lurked invisible to the eye, but only too vivid to the imagination, some of those things that were so familiar to Smidger. The vicar seemed slow to exorcise them. What could science do?

"All that he can do," repeated Glayde. "And as a matter of fact we have an apparatus now, though it has not yet been put on the market, that can entirely expel all foreign objects from air."

"It can create a vacuum?" said Nietjens.

"No, no," said Glayde. "It does not do that. It does not drive out the air. You could not live if it did. What it does is to desiccate the air,

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to drive out every particle of moisture, also odour or dust, in fact everything."

"And spirits?" enquired Nietjens.

"Everything," said Glayde. "I do not know what you may have up among those rafters, or if there is nothing there. But whatever there is will go. This apparatus will leave it completely void, except for the air: smoke will go too."

"And how long will it last?" asked Nietjens.

"You can turn the thing on whenever things worry you," said Glayde. "It is not unlike a wireless transmitting set. A blast from it will expel everything."

"But spirits," said Nietjens, "if there are any there; I didn't know you could affect spirits."

The remark roused Glayde, for there had always been a certain rivalry between science and spiritual things.

"Certainly we can," he replied. "Certainly. We can drift spirits about as easily as anything else. If there are no spirits there the air will remain void. If there are, we can drive them out. Good lord! We can send a man's words to Tokyo without his raising his voice, and in the twenty thousandth part of a second. If we can throw sound about like that, do you think we can't move spirits?" He took another gulp of his benedictine and added, "We have actually changed elements. We have shown what we can do with solid things: don't think that we can't stand up to spirits. We can beat them as we have beaten matter."

It was the best benedictine that could be got in the City, and Nietjens had told his butler to serve it in wine glasses. "The thing is quite new," Glayde went on. "Not yet on the market. But I can let you have a set. It is quite easy to work. You turn a knob and it emits a blast that is active for several yards, quite as far as the top of your roof, and will expel everything from the air and leave it void. Everything. I will get it down here tomorrow."

"But it is very kind of you to take all this trouble," said Nietjens.

"Not at all," said Glayde. "Glad to help you. If anything's there it will drive it away all right."

"How far?" asked Nietjens.

"With the force with which our new apparatus will drive it," said Glayde, "it will go a long way; right outside the earth's atmosphere anyhow. Experiments have been made."

They talked a little longer, then went to bed. And Nietjens slept well, partly perhaps because he had got confidence at last that he would be adequately defended against the powers of the past. Next morning Glayde went back to London, and that afternoon the strange box arrived at the station and was brought by car to the castle, where Nietjens unpacked it and read the instructions.

That night Nietjens dined alone. And in his high room afterwards he

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sat with the queer set on the floor beside him, knowing that he only had to lean over and turn a knob to remove from the air about him and right up to the high rafters anything that might oppress his imagination. So comforted was he by the knowledge that he had by his side the powerful help of science, that it was long before he had any feeling at all that the past had got any hold upon those old walls. But at length a fancy, growing stronger and stronger, began to assure him that among shadows and cornices there lurked those things that were so familiar to Smidger and in which the vicar was so slow to believe. He leaned from his armchair and found the right knob on the set beside him: he turned it and they were all gone. That he could feel at once: nothing haunted the air any more in that new high room among those ancient walls. Of this he felt as certain as a man who is followed knows when he is followed no more. He gave a smoky sigh of relief and sat in deep content in his chair for as long as his cigar lasted, and went then to bed.

That night he often tells of. At what moment he got to sleep, or if ever he did, is not clear, nor is anything in his story entirely clear. He has too much to tell, and in different clubs, and at different times in them, he tells it differently. What seems to have happened is that all the generations of spirits that ever have haunted those walls came that night into his bedroom; and not only that, but spirits that, from his description, must have come from remoter times before that castle was built, and from remote lands. Nobody blames him for giving different accounts of that awful night; for there seem to have been thousands of spirits there, all mouthing at him and mowing at him, and whatever spirits do, and they spoke to him with their shrill bat-like voices, complaining that he was disturbing the past, and the owls and the jackdaws that were watching it in the old castle whose serenity he had troubled, and they all hooted at him for doing so. Old villagers were there in smocks that were queer to him, and old parsons, and people of whom he could give no clear account at all. Once he attempted to run from them, but they all swirled after him and he hurried back to his bed and thought it better to stay there, even though the air was as full of them as bees above a hive that has been disturbed. Sleep, he said, was impossible. He clearly identified one as the ghost of Elizabeth I, from which I suppose that she once stayed there. Henry VIII he said, he saw too, looking very angrily at him, as though he would do something terrible, though he did not know what. And old owners of the castle with their servants and men-at-arms poured in and looked at him, all clearly wondering what he was doing there. There was no keeping them out, for they were

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coming in, he says, under the double doors and through chinks at the sides and between them, and down the chimney and up between the oak planks in the floor, all the people that had ever been there in the eight hundred years through which the castle had stood. And he says that he identified Mahomet, and a Roman soldier, and Khubla Khan or somebody very like him. So that it could not have been only the ghosts of those who had had anything to do with the castle. He tried pulling the sheets and blankets over his head. But they only came nearer then, as he could tell from their gibbering, which he could hear through the blankets, and he was afraid they would get into his bed. So he sat up and faced them; and more and more came pouring into the room through every crack and crevice by which ever a wisp of smoke could pass or an odour of cooking. The dark of the room was pale gray with them. It was a long time, he says, before he realized that they could not hurt him; but he points out to all who listen to his strange story that it is no pleasant experience to be surrounded by angry unfriendly faces packed close together. He calls it the longest night that he ever knew. And then he tells how at last there came creeping in the earliest light through a chink between the curtains, and fell on the ghosts and did not make their gray brighter, and as that welcome light slowly increased, their shapes grew dimmer and dimmer. More than one London club knows that story well, and can make little of it. But Jan Nietjens was determined to get to the bottom of it himself, even if he has never made it clear to others, and he telephoned early next morning to Glayde, asking him to come down at once. And Glayde came that evening, and they talked the whole thing over. To the scientist it was at once perfectly clear what had happened, although he had never thought of it before, and he apologized heartily to Nietjens for his oversight.

"It's not that the thing has failed," he said to him. "It has evidently succeeded, but only too well."

"Succeeded!" exclaimed Nietjens. "Why! I never saw a ghost before. I only knew they were there. And now I assure you there wasn't room in my bedroom last night through which a mouse could have moved between them. They were thick as clouds, I tell you."

"Yes," said the scientist, "I see all that now. I ought to have thought of it, and I am very sorry. What has happened is that the set that I gave you shot them all right out of the atmosphere, just as I told you it would."

"Then why did they all come back?" asked Nietjens. "And worse than ever before."

"That's just it," said Glayde. "You see, I told you it was like wire-

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less. Well, it shot all those spirits up, just as wireless does with sound."

"And what then?" asked Nietjens.

"Why, then, you see," said Glayde, "they hit the Heaviside layer."

"What's that?" asked Nietjens.

"That is what is known," said Glayde, "to everyone who knows anything whatever of wireless. And that's what I do apologize to you for, for not thinking of that."

"What does it do?" asked Nietjens.

"It just bounces everything back," said Glayde. "And I was a fool not to think of it. Without the Heaviside layer we should hear nothing whatever on any wireless set. Everything the transmitting stations send up hits the Heaviside layer and bounces back from it. Of course it was just the same with those spirits. I told you that we could drive them out. And that set of mine did. But I never thought of the Heaviside layer. I am very sorry. Of course they all came back. You must have had an awful time."

"I'd never have thought there could be so many," said Nietjens.

"But look at all the time they have had to grow," replied Glayde. "And this set that I lent you is very powerful: it would have driven the whole lot of them out. And then unfortunately they came back."

"But look here," said Nietjens. "I saw Mahomet there, or somebody very like him, and one of those Roman soldiers. How could they have got here?"

Glayde thought for a moment. "I'm afraid," he said after a while, "those rays that we used were altogether too strong, and I really do apologise. They must have stirred up the Heaviside layer, and brought a lot of things back with the ones that were driven from here."

"But what sort of things?" asked Nietjens.

"Well, Mahomet for one," said Glayde. "They're all there. Have you ever read Milton?"

"I've read *Paradise Lost*," said Nietjens.

"Exactly," said Glayde.

"But does Milton mention your Heaviside layer?" Nietjens asked.

"Not by name," replied Glayde. "But he describes it. Milton calls it Limbo. A waste place at the back of earth, just where the Heaviside layer would be, full of vain spirits. I am afraid that our discharge of radioelectric waves was too strong and it has disturbed them. Once more I apologize. It must have stirred them all up, and the whole lot of them must have come here with the ghosts driven out of the castle. They must have brought all the others with them on their way back. I'm really very sorry."

"Don't mention it," said Nietjens. "But what are we to do now? I don't want another night like that. I really don't think I could stand it. And anyhow I must get some sleep. What are we to do?"

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"Let sleeping dogs lie," said Glayde.

"Let them lie?" muttered Nietjens.

"Yes, they weren't really doing you any harm," said Glayde. "You merely knew they were there, and that was all. They weren't hurting you. Leave them alone. Those unfortunate rays of mine stirred them all up, and they must have been wandering the night like wasps, if you put gunpowder into their nest without killing them. I've known men to sleep comfortably, night after night for years, with hornets' nests in their bedrooms. And the hornets gave them no trouble. But leave them alone. That's my advice to you."

They had dined, and now they were back in their chairs in the high room. Taking advice from Glayde had given Nietjens the most miserable night he had ever had, but he listened to Glayde still. "All right," said Nietjens. "We'll leave them alone."

For a while both men sat silent over their coffee. And then a yearning came over Jan Nietjens for the sound of the streets, for the frequent meeting with friends, for the clubs, for London.

"I want you to promise me one thing," he said to Glayde.

"Yes?" said Glayde.

"I want you to promise," said Nietjens, "never to say a word about this to anyone."

"Well, yes," replied Glayde. "But it's a pity. I'd have liked to talk it over with one or two men. It's interesting."

"Well, not for a few weeks," said Nietjens. "Will you promise me?"

"Very well," said Glayde. "If you like. Why?"

Nietjens glanced for a moment up at the high rafters.

"Because I was thinking of selling the place," he said.

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WARNING: *Mack Reynolds is one of the foremost advocates and practitioners of "fun in science-fiction," as he and Fredric Brown subtitled their spacehappy anthology* SCIENCE-FICTION CARNIVAL. *You've read some hilarious stories by him here, and I hope that some publisher is contemplating a collection of the absurdities of this farceur of Deep Space, this extra-global Gobel. But now, for once, Reynolds is in a strictly serious mood, and you'll find no room for chuckles in this tight little melodrama of the hijacking of alien life and the singular effectiveness of a strange new defense mechanism.*

All the World Loves a Luvver

by MACK REYNOLDS

"LISTEN," TWO STEP HAGGERTY said. "I thought I heard something then." He tossed his cards down and shifted in the direction of the receiver.

"I didn't hear nothing."

"Listen, damn it. I tell you I heard something that time."

Whitey shook his head. "Nothing in this sector. Pulled a dub again."

"Will you shut up? There. There it is again."

They scrambled to their feet, the card game forgotten, and strained toward the set. Faintly they could make it out.

Stand off. Approaching a Restricted Zone. Stand off.

"That's it!" Haggerty triumphed. "Just like the old man said. Get a fix on it, Whitey."

"Getting it," the little man said.

Several hours later the call was coming in clearly.

STAND OFF. APPROACHING A RESTRICTED ZONE. LANDING FORBIDDEN. STAND OFF.

Haggerty let his eyes go quickly around the cabin of the space cruiser. "Get your gun off that table," he snapped. "They might fade in any time now. They spot that and they'd smell a rat. Let's see. Everything else looks right. Maybe you better put on that sport jacket and take that cigar out of your mouth."

Whitey obediently spat out the bedraggled cigar stub but in regards to the coat he said, "Too hot."

"Put it on anyway, dammit. We're supposed to look like a coupla greenies with dough enough to go scooting around space just for kicks"

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But it was too late for the coat. Suddenly the tel-screen lit up framing the impatient angular face of a man in a worn Space Forces uniform.

His voice snapped, "Haven't you received our warnings? You're entering a restricted security zone."

Two Step Haggerty had had his excuse ready for the past two months. He said unctuously, "Sorry, Lieutenant. Fuel doesn't seem to be burning correctly. We're going to have to set her down. You being here is a godsend. We were beginning to . . ."

The spaceman interrupted. "You'll have to make it to another port. You can land here only in extreme emergency."

Absolute sincerity dripped from Haggerty's voice now. "Lieutenant," he said, a beefy hand making a pleading gesture, "this *is* an extreme emergency. We wouldn't be able to get any further."

"Just a moment." The screen went dark.

Haggerty spun around to Whitey, his heavy face beaming. "That's them and we got 'em on the hook."

"Hope so," Whitey said. The wizened little grifter checked the miniature stun gun which he took from his pocket with small, highly manicured hands, flicked back the cock lever before returning the weapon to its hiding place.

When the screen went on again, there was another face, this time that of a worried redhead. "You're sure you can't continue?" he asked.

Haggerty nodded emphatically. "Positive, Lieutenant. We must have repairs."

There was a shrug in the other's voice. "Okay, then. Lieutenant Benton is making arrangements for your landing. Come in on the beam. One thing. The important thing. You must realize that if you land here there is a strong possibility that you may never leave."

Haggerty let his eyes go round, when they would rather have narrowed. "Never leave?" he said.

The spaceman nodded. "This is a point of extreme danger. It is not a military base in the ordinary sense of the word. We are here to warn off spacecraft. In a way, we are similar to the lighthouses of ancient Terra."

"Whatever it is, Lieutenant, we've *got* to land."

"Listen carefully to these instructions, then. After landing, don't leave your ship and don't look out the ports. You'll be in considerable danger from the native animal life every moment you're on this planet. We'll protect you to the extent possible but you'll be obliged to obey our commands explicitly."

"You're the boss, Lieutenant."

Two hours later the small cruiser had landed safely at the single small spaceport the mystery planet boasted. Two Step Haggerty and Whitey waited for the entrance of the Space Forces representatives.

"There's no doubt about it now,"

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Haggerty whispered to his diminutive partner. "It's just like old man Macbride said. This is exactly the way he described it. And did you get that name? Lieutenant Benton. That was the name of one of the two guys he told us about."

"Maybe there's more than two now," Whitey said.

"Nah. Even if there was, they're not looking for trouble. We're all set. Worse that could happen is we'd have to burn a few of them."

Whitey licked his upper lip with the tip of a pale tongue while contemplating that possibility.

They heard now a tapping at the inner door of the space lock and Haggerty lumbered quickly over to open it. The visitors had already closed the outer lock so nothing could be seen behind them.

The older, angular-faced lieutenant held out a hand to be shaken. "I'm Steven Benton, Officer Commanding Security Base 1645R. This is Lieutenant Dave Malone, my assistant." He indicated his redheaded, freckled-faced companion.

"Certainly is a relief to get down, gentlemen," Haggerty's face went wry. "I suppose a man with no more experience than I shouldn't go out into deep space without a competent mechanic on board. But you know how it is."

Lieutenant Benton was plainly irritated with them. He said, "What seems to be the matter?"

"Don't know," Whitey said.

Haggerty said, "Let me introduce myself, Lieutenant. My name is James M. Haggerty and this is my business associate Mr. Raymond White."

The two spacemen nodded. Lieutenant Benton said, "You said something about the fuel."

Haggerty's face assumed the martyred expression of those who can afford ultra-luxurious means of transportation but know nothing of their workings given an emergency. "I don't know if it's that or not. Can you imagine? I paid more than two thousand for this dog and can't get it past twenty star systems before I start having trouble."

The two lieutenants' faces showed that they could imagine but that it didn't make them happy.

"Very well," Lieutenant Benton sighed. "We'll look it over. Meanwhile, I suppose, we'll have to take you into our living quarters. Repairs might take as much as several days."

"Uh . . . you have mechanics?"

Benton shook his head. "Lieutenant Malone and I are alone, but both of us have had considerable experience with space craft. The government has large supplies of repair equipment here for just such emergencies as this." He added, "The idea is to get a ship away as soon as possible."

"Very mysterious," Haggerty said.

The redheaded Malone nodded sour agreement to that. "It gets worse. You gentlemen are going to have to stay cooped up in our quarters until we're finished with your

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ship. We're going to have to have your promises that you won't leave the house and that you won't look out the windows. We'll keep them curtained, of course, so that you won't break your word inadvertently."

"If that's the way you want it," Haggerty said.

"Mr. White?" Lieutenant Malone asked.

"Got my promise," Whitey told him.

Haggerty said softly, "You rather surprise me, gentlemen. You continually speak of the danger here but I notice that you don't carry sidearms."

"The danger isn't of the type from which a gun could protect you." Benton shifted his shoulders, as though the very idea was repugnant. "I'm afraid you'll have to wear blindfolds for the short walk to our quarters." He brought two dark cloths from his pocket.

Haggerty went to a closet and brought forth two lightweight spacesuits and helmets, handed one to Whitey and began climbing into his own.

"You won't need those," Dave Malone sighed. "Don't you notice that neither of us is wearing one? It's an A-1112 Earth-type planet. We can even eat the plant life."

Two Step Haggerty stuck his lower lip out truculently. "Instructions to travelers in space are to wear suits whenever on a strange planet. You never know." He continued to climb into his suit.

Malone insisted, "But I just told you . . ."

Steven Benton said, "Let them wear them, if they want to, Dave. They'll be a little uncomfortable is all."

When the two were spacesuited and blindfolded, they were led through the space lock and down a portable ramp to the ground. For several hundred yards they could feel turf underfoot, then they entered another door.

Turf on a spaceport. That'd tell you how many ships landed here!

Inside, their bandages were removed and they let their eyes go around the large living room.

Two Step Haggerty took off his helmet and laid it on a sofa. He indicated the room with its automatic bar, its autochef, its books, movie projector, phonovision set.

"You do all right here," he said. "How often do they send you supplies?"

Dave Malone went to the autobar and punched buttons. "Would you two gentlemen like an Old Fashioned? They come about twice a year."

"An Old Fashioned's fine." Haggerty took the drink offered him. "Don't land, eh? Just drop the stuff and leave." He sank down into the sofa next to Whitey.

"That's right," Dave Malone said, taking a sip of his own drink.

Steve Benton snapped suddenly, "How did you know? How did you

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know they dropped the supplies rather than landing and unloading the ordinary way?"

Two Step Haggerty grinned at the gaunt faced spaceman. "Oh oh. I made a slip that time, didn't I? Whitey, show them our credentials."

Whitey unhurriedly put his drink down on a coffee table, put his hand in his side pocket and brought forth his stun gun. He pointed it in the general direction of the two spacemen, and looked at them unblinkingly.

There was a full two minutes of shocked silence, during which time Two Step Haggerty grinned at them.

"Surprise, boys!"

Steve Benton said through tight lips, "What is this supposed to mean? You realize, of course, that this is a Space Forces Security Base."

Haggerty took a long pull at his drink. "You ain't just a-whistlin' *Terra Forever*. We know it. Matter of fact, we've been looking for it for two months now. You'd be surprised, Lieutenant, how hard it is to dig up information on Security Base 1645R."

"No we wouldn't," Dave Malone growled, his face so red with anger the freckles were almost submerged.

Steve Benton slumped back into a chair. "What do you want?" he said flatly. "How did you know about this base?"

"Take the last question first," Two Step Haggerty said easily. "Me and Whitey, here, was trying to con a mark a few months back. Got him tight, see? Kept him that way, three, four days. Fourth day we forgot all about conning him."

"Why?" Malone blurted.

"Because he was so gone he forgot the promise he made to you boys. He told us about Security Base 1645R. And that brings us to the first question you asked, Lieutenant. What we want."

He finished off his drink and set the glass down on the coffee table. "We want a couple of *luvvers*, Lieutenant."

The silence was pregnant. Through it Two Step Haggerty sat relaxed, one leg crossed over the other. Whitey sat imperturbably, the gun negligently pointed at a spot approximately half way between the two space men.

Dave Malone said, "Nothing is wrong with your ship, then?"

Haggerty shook his head. Smiled at them pleasantly.

Steven Benton snapped, "You don't know what you're talking about. You don't know what you're asking."

Haggerty nodded. "Yes we do. And it's not exactly a matter of asking. We want two *luvvers*. That's a corny name you dreamed up for them, by the way."

Benton flushed. "It's a nickname I . . . I kind of thought up for my own use when I was alone here. The Bureau of Xenobiology has a more scientific —"

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"OK, OK. So we'll call 'em *luvvers*. Somehow Whitey and me, we didn't pick up much Latin back when we was taking our doctor's degrees. At any rate we're going to take two of them with us. I'm afraid if you boys give us too much trouble that Whitey'll have to put a couple of large holes in you."

He yawned widely. "Come to think of it, he might have to do it anyway. You never know."

"If you saw a *luvver*," Benton bit out angrily, "you'd never leave this planet. You wouldn't be able to tear yourselves away. Don't be fools. Let us take you back to your ship and you can leave. Your criminal records mean nothing to us — I suppose you have them."

Whitey smiled faintly at that, jiggled the barrel of the stun gun up and down to express his amusement.

Haggerty said, "Tell us all about it, Lieutenant. Maybe we didn't get *all* the dope from old man Macbride. Tell us all about the *luvver*."

Benton's lips clamped shut.

Haggerty said softly, "Just in the way of convincing you that we're pretty tough boys, I could have Whitey here put some light through your redhead pal. In fact, now that I think of it, he could put some light through both of you. I got a sneaking suspicion that some place in this house there's some copies of reports you've made to the Space Force High Command all about the *luvvers*."

Steven Benton shifted in his chair. He said, "All right. You'd find the reports anyway. What do you want to know?"

"First off, whata they look like? How big are they?"

What amounted almost to a glaze came over the eyes of the Space Lieutenant. He said, "Why, they're the cutest little animals you ever saw." He made vague motions with his hands. "Maybe this big, but, well, they're *cuddlesome*. You want to, well, pick them up, hold them . . ."

"Cuddlesome," Haggerty repeated, shaking his head. "Brother, you've really got it. Listen, skip the description, you better start at the beginning."

Benton thought back. "The beginning," he said. "I suppose the beginning is a description of the *luvver's* peculiar defensive mechanism." He looked at the gunmen. "You're familiar with some of the strange methods of defense animals have acquired even on Terra. You have the turtle which carries his fort around with him; the porcupine, with its needles; the flying fish, the kangaroo."

"Okay, okay," Haggerty said. "So every animal has its own defense mechanism."

"Some of them go beyond the usual physical attributes," Benton said. "Take the chameleon, which can camouflage itself by changing its color to blend with its surroundings and fool the optic nerves. Then there's the wart hog, so ugly that

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it frightens its potential enemies. And —"

Whitey waggled his gun. "OK. We got that."

Steve Benton nodded. "All right. As Mr. Macbride evidently has told you, the *luvver* has the strangest defense method of all. Through some means, unknown to us, it has the power of inspiring affection in all life forms with which it comes in contact."

Dave Malone put in, by way of emphasis, "That doesn't sound like much at first. But what Steve means is really *undying* affection." He began making the vague descriptive gestures his partner had been using a moment before. "They're about this big. And when you first see them . . ." His voice went husky. ". . . well, it does something inside you. You want to . . ."

"I know," Haggerty said. "They're *cuddlesome*." He looked at Whitey and said, "I can't wait till I see you with one."

Benton went on. "Understand, *everything*, not just everybody, loves a *luvver*. Nothing could dream of hurting one. In fact, its big difficulty is in keeping other animals away. They'll follow a *luvver* in droves, adoringly. Omnivorous, like man, it never has trouble securing all the meat it wants. Its animal victims just come close and lovingly let themselves be killed and eaten. Or perhaps I should say eaten and killed. The *luvver* is biophagous."

"The little darling," Malone murmured, as if every trait of the creature was equally endearing.

Haggerty noted the important point. "Eat everything a man eats? Then we haven't got any feeding problem — don't even need all that guck we laid in from the All Planets Pettery. . . . But you guys mean to say the other animals just stand still and serve themselves for dinner?"

"The ability of the *luvver* to create affection," said Benton, a trifle pedantically as if he was quoting from his report, "is stronger even than the instinct of self-preservation."

Two Step Haggerty leaned forward, his eyes narrow. "You mean, for instance, that if a *luvver* wanted to eat one of you guys, you'd let it do it?"

"Happily, we aren't faced with that problem. The *luvvers* don't seem to care for human flesh. Although I assume they'd eat it if nothing else was available."

Haggerty nodded. "How'd you first discover the things?"

Steve Benton closed his eyes wearily and looked back over the years. "Let's see, it was twelve, no, thirteen years ago. I landed here in a one man scout when the fleet was holding maneuvers in this sector. It became impossible for me to leave but I was able to contact my superiors and explain the situation." He added, wryly, "They were a bit skeptical, at first."

"What happened?"

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"It's a long story. Before it was through, four other men, who landed and were then ordered off the planet and back to their ships, were dead. Two died of acute melancholia, the others were suicides. They couldn't bear to be kept away from the *luvvers*. At any rate, it wound up with me assigned permanently to this base and the whole subject being treated as top, top secret."

Haggerty jerked his thumb at Dave Malone, who had sat scowling through this. "Where does the redhead come in?"

"About eight years ago a freighter in distress had to land here. I gave them the usual warnings and everybody on board obeyed them except Dave." He grinned sourly at his friend. "Dave had too much curiosity for his own good. He sneaked from the ship, saw a *luvver*, and, of course, had to stay."

Two Step Haggerty rubbed the tip of his nose thoughtfully. "And except for old man Macbride and his daughter, nobody else has been hooked, eh?"

"That's right. About two years ago Macbride's sporter was forced down here and while we were repairing the jets, his daughter managed to get out one night and barely spotted a *luvver*. I got there in time to slug her on the jaw before it got too close, and then we gave her a heavy dose of lethe drug. We had to take her father in on the secret then, so that when she awoke, two days later, out in space, he would know enough to bring her back in case she remembered and had to return."

Dave Malone said bitterly, "We might have known the old jerk would slip up some day and let the secret out. How many more has he told?"

Haggerty grinned at him. "Nobody else." He assumed a mocking expression. "Secrets like this are important. They oughta be kept." He indicated Whitey with a thumb. "Whitey here made sure Macbride would never tell no more secrets."

The redhead was shocked. "You mean you killed him?"

"I wouldn't put it that way. Let's just say he died of over-ventilation of the left lung. I wish to hell we'd got a better description of just where your planet was located from him. It took us two months to find it."

Steve Benton said bitterly, "I don't know what your game is, Haggerty, but I can't see why it was necessary to eliminate Macbride. Now that you have the full story, you can see how impossible is whatever scheme you had in mind. We are not police, and, while I admit that this must go into my report, we will not hinder your leaving. I suggest that you let us blindfold you and lead you back to your ship."

Haggerty came to his feet and made his way to the automatic bar. He pushed studs and brought forth two icy glasses, then returned to his place on the sofa. He handed one of

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the drinks to his companion. "Me and Whitey's taking two of them back with us," he said.

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"Look what it would mean if you took a *luvver* back to civilization with you. Suppose you put one in a zoo. Millions of persons would crowd the place, day and night, trying to get a loving glimpse. Hundreds of thousands would try to bribe, steal, fight over it in an attempt to acquire it for themselves."

"Ummmm," Haggerty said. "But we're not going to put them in a zoo. We're going to just show the little rascals to a few selected guys — guys with lots of dough."

The implications of his words sank into the spacemen. "You mean you'd have the brutal . . ."

He nodded pleasantly. "You nice boys would be surprised what some folks like me and Whitey will do for money. Especially the amount of money we could squeeze out of some old duffer who was allowed to spot a *luvver* and then wanted to see it again."

Steve Benton still had his hole card. "You've got one big drawback. In order to do all this you're going to have to be exposed to a *luvver* yourself. Under its influence you won't be able to hurt it in any way. Certainly you aren't going to be able to take if off this planet, simply because it wouldn't want to go, and you won't have the ability to work against its wishes." He shook his head decisively. "You just can't comprehend your reaction as soon as you see your first *luvver*."

Haggerty came to his feet. "I'll admit, boys, that that is the delicate point. But we think we've got it licked. That's the why-for of the spacesuits and these special helmets. You see, when I got to thinking about old man Macbride's story, it came to me that this defense the *luvver*'s got has to work through the mind. Nothing else makes sense. The animal's exercising some telepathic power."

"That's probably right," Steve Benton admitted. "We've already decided that on our own."

Two Step Haggerty picked up his space helmet. "And that's where these come in. About three years ago this professor on Mars comes out with this here material that'll shield off telepathy. Got lead in it, titanium, several other things. I don't understand it, myself. But I'm gambling it'll shield us from *luvvers*."

He slipped the helmet over his head. "Come on, Whitey. Let's get going. Might as well check it now as ever." He jerked his head at the spacemen. "Okay, you boys go first."

Dave Malone looked at Steve Benton.

Haggerty chuckled drily. "Don't try it, boys. Don't ever get into the other man's game. See Whitey, there? See that pale look he's got around the gills? That's the way Whitey looks when he thinks he might get a chance to ventilate

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somebody. It's a caution the way Whitey likes to ventilate folks. Be dead people all around if I didn't hold him down."

Their faces flat, Steven Benton and Dave Malone led the way through the front door and out onto the tarmac of the spaceport. The two gunmen followed easily enough in their light spacesuits.

Benton turned and looked at them quizzically.

"What's the matter now?" Haggerty growled. He motioned Benton on with a thumb.

"There's your first *luvver*," Steve Benton said. His gaunt face had relaxed and now an adoring expression came over it. His eyes shone his affection.

Haggerty stared. "So that's it, eh?"

The little animal had been drowsing in the shade of the small hangar at the field's edge. It was about the size of a fox terrier and in appearance somewhat resembled a marmoset. It looked over at them wistfully.

Dave Malone sighed aloud.

Haggerty said, "It's a cute little thing all right. How am I supposed to feel if it's getting to me?"

Lieutenant Steve Benton shot an incredulous stare at him. "You mean . . . you mean you're not affected?"

The *luvver* detached itself from the shadow of the hangar and strolled languidly toward them. Haggerty stooped down, brought it up into his arms. It stared at him with limpid eyes, unafraid. There seemed to be a slight surprise in its intelligent face, thus to be handled so cavalierly, but not in ten thousand years had one of its kind found harm at the hands of another living creature. It didn't bother to attempt escape.

"This one a special trained pet?" Haggerty said.

Steve Benton said, "No. No, they're all like that. They cuddle up to anybody, anything. Nothing'd dream of hurting one. How can anybody . . . how can *you*? Don't you see its eyes? Don't you *feel* its . . . its love?" He was restraining himself with effort, seeing the animal in another man's arms.

Dave Malone took a protesting step forward, and found a gun grinding into his back.

Whitey said, "Calm down, Buster."

"There's another one," Haggerty said. "Keep these guys covered while I get it." He strode off, the *luvver* under one arm.

"Look," Steve Benton began desperately to Whitey, "you can't do this. There are angles you don't know about. You haven't enough information to have a clear picture. Look, I'll use any influence I can muster to —"

"Shut up," Whitey said.

"But —"

The finger on the trigger tightened slightly. "Shut up," Whitey repeated.

Haggerty returned with the other *luvver*. "Here we are," he said. He

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looked at the two spacemen and his eyes went thoughtful. "How long before your next ship comes with supplies?"

"Four months," Malone bit out.

Two Step Haggerty said; "Tell you what I'm going to do, boys. I'm going to give you a break. I know better than to have the deaths of a couple of space forces officers on my hands." He grinned. "Four months from now Whitey and me'll have enough dough to buy us out of any other rap in the system."

"I doubt it," Dave Malone said bitterly.

"Why?" Haggerty growled back at him. "It's a cinch."

Steven Benton said, "We told you you couldn't get away with this, Haggerty, and we meant it."

"Come on, Whitey," Haggerty said. "Let's get back to the ship. They haven't got any weapons on them. They can't stop us. Let's get going."

They backed toward the ship, Whitey's gun covering the spacemen, slipped inside through the spacelock.

Dave Malone and Steve Benton cleared away from the firing zone. They watched after the ship long, long after it was out of sight in the blueness of the sky.

Malone said sadly, "Imagine taking two of the darlings away from us."

"They wouldn't believe me," Steve Benton said. "They wouldn't listen. The one important thing evidently never occurred to them. They learned about the defensive mechanism of the *luvver*." A shiver of horror went through him. "But they never bothered to find out about its offensive mechanism, its means of killing its prey. I did tell them it was biophagous . . . but I think they were rather proud of knowing little Latin and less Greek."

Dave Malone said sadly, "The poor little darlings . . . They'll have to eat human flesh, and they don't really like it at all."

Benton nodded dolorous agreement.

"And after they've killed and eaten those two men, the only living food on the spaceship, they'll be all alone out there until they die of starvation. . . ."

The two officers stared mournfully into the depths of space.

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F&SF has brought you some broadly and some quietly funny items from Punch; *but here, from that rewarding weekly, is a vision of the future which is satiric, half-farcical . . . and not at all funny.*

On the Way to Her Sister

by J. B. MORTON

IT WAS A COLD MORNING IN JUNE. Clive Merivale set off to walk to his office in the West End. When he came to a corner, round which was situated the block of buildings in which he worked, he paused to light his pipe, and before it was lit several people had fallen in behind him. For this was the year 1960, and the habit of forming a queue for no particular reason had become universal in London. The docility of the public had been considerably increased by a series of instructions issued by various Government Departments. It was pointed out that forming queues was a kind of military movement which would discipline the public, relieve the obstructions in the streets, and discourage the idle from crossing the road without a sufficiently good reason. There were the normal queues outside shops and television theatres, and at helicopter stops. But pedestrians now had a tendency to get into a queue whenever a street was even slightly overcrowded.

Merivale was a light-hearted young man, given to gay pranks. He glanced over his shoulder and saw that there were already a dozen queuers neatly arranged behind him. He buttoned his overcoat and looked to his front, trying to adopt the patient attitude of the practised queuer. Those behind him knew that a queue often remained motionless for a long time, and they settled down to wait. A woman with a basket, and with an eye for symmetry, stepped into the vacant place beside Merivale, who took a step forward, peered round the corner, and shook his head, as though he had seen a solid line ahead of him. After five minutes he shuffled forward two paces, which brought him level with the corner; then, after another minute, he rounded the corner.

"Why, my goodness," said the woman at his side, "we're at the very head of the queue! Isn't that a bit of luck?"

"Yes, isn't it?" said Merivale.

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"First time it's happened to me for months," said the woman in a pleased tone.

"Really?" said Merivale. "Congratulations to us, eh?"

"You've said it," replied the woman. "We can go ahead with it, can't we?"

"I don't see why not," said Merivale, moving forward gingerly. "Can't rush it," he added. "It mucks up the formation behind. They get all ragged. Must take it slowly."

So he took it slowly, with a decent pause between each forward shuffle. And in this way the leading file reached the entrance doors of the building, on one side of which a big brass plate announced "Baldicott, Baldicott, Baldicott and Trudge, Assessors of Chemical Fertilizer Accessories."

"Is this where we go?" asked the woman.

"I suppose so," said Merivale. "I noticed a queue coming towards us from the other direction, and the new regulation says that when two queues meet, the larger must turn sharp right. I think we're the larger of the two." He stepped back from the entrance, as though to make sure. Then, with the woman still at his side, he shuffled slowly down a passage. At the foot of broad stairs he made a long pause, to give the followers time to close up. He could hear a small boy crying with rage, and an irritable voice said, "I'm sure I don't know where they're taking us."

"Cut out the grousing!" a man shouted. "It doesn't help."

Merivale and his companion began to ascend the stairs — a step and a pause, a step and a pause.

"Anyone can tell you're good at this," said the woman. "Some of them just dash on when there's nothing ahead. Unfair on everyone, I call it. Puts the wind up the ones at the back, who can't see what's going on and don't like those sudden spurts. And a spurt always means a long wait further on."

"That's what I always say," Merivale answered.

"I suppose there'll be a back way out — down back stairs or something," said the woman.

"I expect so," said Merivale. "We'd all look pretty silly if we couldn't get out."

"I would," said the woman. "I'm supposed to be going to see my sister. Luckily she lives near here."

"She ought to have joined the queue," said Merrivale.

That made the woman laugh heartily. "Mohammed coming to the mountain," she said, "only her name isn't Mohammed. It's Alice." And she laughed more loudly than ever.

A tenor voice in the rear began to sing. "There's a long, long trail a-winding."

"Cut out the singing!" shouted the angry man. "It doesn't help."

"Well, I happen to think it does help," said the haughty voice of a girl.

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"No accounting for tastes."

"You keep your tastes to yourself."

"Thanks, I will, and no help needed from you."

"Polite, aren't you?"

"We're nearly there, Dick," said a patient, motherly voice to the raging boy.

"Nearly where?" asked someone patiently.

"You wouldn't be any the wiser if you knew," said the mother.

Meanwhile Merivale was at the top of the first flight of stairs. A man came out of a door, stopped, and flinched in mock alarm. "Morning, Merivale," he said, "I see you've brought the family."

"He must have jumped the queue," said the woman. "How did he know your name?"

"He must have guessed it," said Merivale.

"Ah, go on!" said the woman, and howled with laughter.

The ascent of the second flight of stairs began. Merivale was wondering what on earth to do with the crowd which stretched down behind him, along the passage and out into the street. Peering over the well of the stairs he could see the solid mass. Presently there was a commotion below. Looking back, Merivale saw that Mr. John Baldicott was trying to push his way up the stairs. There were cries of exasperation.

"Who does he think he is? . . . Take your place! . . . Hey! You can't do that! . . . It's a damned scandal! . . . Stop shoving! . . . Chuck him out! . . ."

Mr. John Baldicott took no notice of all this abuse. He barged his way to the head of the first flight and disappeared through a door. His raised voice could be heard saying "Who the devil are all these people, Clayton?" He found it difficult to believe that they had all come to have chemical fertilizer accessories assessed.

"He seems to live here, the lucky brute," said Merivale's companion. "I wonder how many more floors there are."

"Four more," said Merivale.

"You've done this before, then?"

"Every day," said Merivale.

"Phugh!" said the woman.

When they reached the second landing Merivale said, "I'll go and ask someone."

He stepped quickly forward, entered the room where he worked, and waited a moment or two. He could hear a dull murmur outside. Then he came out again on to the landing and addressed the multitude.

"We're to go back," he said.

A roar of wrath greeted the words. Merivale held up his hand for silence. "It's only fair," he said, "that the head of the queue should now become its tail. I'm quite ready to go last. We'll just all turn round, and those at the back will be in front. O.K.?"

The people in the middle realized that they were getting the worst of both worlds, and they protested

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loudly. They would still be in the middle.

"It's the fairest way," said Merivale. "I'm the biggest loser."

"What price me?" said the woman. "I don't know why we ever came in here at all."

"Nor do I," said Merivale. "But there it is. Let's get a move on."

Sulkily the throng turned about, and began, by instinct, to shuffle slowly down the stairs, until someone shouted, "Get a move on!"

Merivale and his companion fell in at the rear. When he came to the head of the stairs Merivale paused.

"I'll have to go back a minute," he said. "I left my hat in that room."

"I'll keep your place," said the woman, glancing round to see if there were any newcomers.

"Thanks," said Merivale.

"I expect we'll meet again," she said, "next time I have to go to my sister's."

Merivale went back into the room and, from a window, watched the queue emerging from the entrance and beginning to break up into units. But the pavement was very crowded, and soon those who had got away quickly enough began to re-form and to proceed in a slow and orderly manner in the direction from which they had originally come.

GROUSE ARE SCARCE THIS YEAR

WHILE grouse are being harried through the heather
  Like remnants of a persecuted race
  Or Buchan heroes, though they have to face
Only hill-foxes, beaters, guns, and the weather,
Recall that should the nations altogether
  Lose patience with each other, in that case
  The barren moors would be the safest place,
Perhaps, for birds of quite another feather.
Poor Man, one of a few survivors only,
  His food what he can find, a cave his house,
    Shy as the wildest beasts, and occupied
Always with staying alive, and always lonely,
  May well be kept awake at night by grouse
    Calling in thousands on the mountainside.

PETER DICKINSON

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The theme of The Man Without a Shadow goes back at least 142 years, to Adelbert von Chamisso's THE WONDROUS TALE OF PETER SCHLEMIHL; *but, like all the great themes of fantasy, it remains inexhaustible. Now Marc Brandel brings to it the insight of a skilled novelist (whose* THE TIME OF THE FIRE *was last year's most successful fusion of murder mystery with penetrating study of character) to create this sensitive and moving story.*

Cast the First Shadow

by MARC BRANDEL

IN EVERY WAY BUT ONE ERNIE COMBS was a very ordinary young man. His single difference from other people came to light on his fifth birthday and, though it seemed trifling enough to him at the time, its discovery cut his life as sharply into two parts as a crippling accident.

It was a sunny day at the beginning of June and Ernie's father, who was a clerk in a chemical supply company, had promised to take him rowing on the lake in Central Park. They were walking through the zoo. Ernie, an affectionate child, holding on to his father's hand was trotting to keep up, when it happened. For some time he had been watching his father's shadow moving smoothly without effort over the rough path in front of them. It puzzled him.

"Dad," he asked presently, "what makes that black thing move like that? Why doesn't it bump into things?"

"That's my shadow," his father told him. And then because he was a man of an exact practical nature: "When the sun hits something solid," he explained, "the light can't get through. So that makes a dark patch on the ground. It's called a shadow."

Ernie nodded wisely, not understanding, and trotted on for a while in silence. Then: "why don't I have a . . . a whatyousaid?" he asked casually.

"Shadow. Of course you do. Everybody has a shadow." His father stopped suddenly, looking at the ground, at his own shadow spreading like a dark pool of oil away from his feet. Then he moved a little to one side. He stepped away from his son altogether. He walked around

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in front of him and stared at the ground again.

"Move," he said at last in an odd, coated voice.

Ernie obediently moved.

"Again," his father almost shouted. "Jump up and down. Wave your arms."

Ernie did. People stopped to watch. His father seized him by the hand, dragging him away.

"We're going home," he said. Ernie could feel his father's distress seeping into his own hand like a painful current. He began to cry.

"You promised we'd go on the lake."

"We're going home," his father repeated.

Ernie's mother was surprised to see them home so soon. His father explained. She frowned in disbelief. He made Ernie show her. And then they tried everything. They stood him in front of every window in the house. They banked whole batteries of lighted bulbs behind him. They made him stand in every position they could think of. They made him move around and they made him keep still.

None of it did any good. The fact remained: in every other way a perfectly ordinary child, Ernie cast no shadow.

They thumped and prodded him. In his experimental zeal his father stuck a pin into Ernie's arm. Ernie cried. He was solid enough, at least to the touch, though he cried less from pain than because he couldn't understand what he had done to frighten and anger his parents this way: he didn't understand what he was being punished for.

Ernie's mother and father were never able to decide on the cause of their son's peculiarity, or on a possible cure for it. But on one thing they were in perfect agreement. They were determined to keep it dark. They both felt it was an unnatural and shameful thing, a dreadful family stigma they must bear in secret. If they had been asked why they felt that way they would have replied indignantly, as something too obvious to need explaining: "Because everybody else has a shadow, of course!"

But they couldn't really expect to keep it a secret for ever. They could make Ernie stay indoors on sunny days. They could keep him away from lighted places where strangers might notice his awful difference. But the law compelled them to send him to school.

Ernie's school days were a repetitious ordeal. At each new school there would be a fresh beginning, the other children accepting him as one of themselves. Timidly, fearfully he would try to make friends: he would forget sometimes for a whole hour at a time that he was any different from them. But sooner or later the end would always come. They always found out. Their first fear and awe would turn quickly to hate and derision. Ernie would arrive home one day with a split lip or a

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black eye. There would be the familiar scene: his mother holding him against her — "My poor baby. What have we done to deserve this?" — his father regarding him with resentful pity.

Ernie's parents would move to a different neighborhood. Ernie would be sent to yet another school.

But until he was twelve Ernie himself never quite gave up hope. Every morning as soon as he awoke he would feel his way out of bed and with his eyes still closed plant himself in front of the window in his room. Then, willing the improbable with all his strength, he would slowly open his eyes. An unbroken string of failures depressed but did not totally dishearten him. The morning of his twelfth birthday was his final hope. He had heard that every seven years you changed completely. It was exactly seven years since the first discovery of his difference. That morning he willed harder and longer than ever. One thing at least about him still hadn't changed. He never tried again: from then on Ernie accepted his affliction as permanent.

In many ways this acceptance made things easier for him: he entered less resentfully into his parents' sad conspiracy to keep his stigma a secret. He became adept at avoiding bright open spaces, at staying in the shadows where his own lack of one didn't matter because it was unnoticeable. He managed to stay at one school for a whole three years.

At eighteen Ernie Combs was a pale, rather tall young man with a pleasant ordinary face and no remarkable aptitudes or intelligence. His parents had never dared to have other children. The series of furnished apartments in which they lived had never been more than shamed hiding places. His father had long ceased to be either practical or exact: he avoided his son in convenient saloons. His mother had taken to vague good works. Ernie understood he had ruined their lives. He left home without regret to make his own furtive place in the world.

He had put in a lot of thought about his choice of a career, tending at first towards coal mining or dark room work in photography. But he had later abandoned them both as unrealistic. It was in just such places that a sudden beam of light could most easily betray him. He had come to see that his best hope lay not in total darkness, but in indirect lighting. The job's only other essentials were: it must be in a tall building on the south side of the street so he could enter and leave without risk, and there must always be plenty of people about in the lobby and elevators. There was safety for Ernie in crowds and confusion.

He found what he wanted without much trouble and was taken on at a dim little salary in the stock room of a warehouse just off Fourth Avenue. The fluorescent lights all

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over the ceiling, the racks and boxes of merchandise all over the floor cast such a profusion of shadows that his would never be missed.

He rented a furnished room nearby and settled into a cautious routine. For the first time in thirteen years Ernie felt safe.

At first that was all he asked. It was more than enough for him. But then after a surprisingly short time it wasn't. After only a few weeks Ernie began to feel there must be more to living — or should be — than safety. He was lonely; he wanted friends; he longed for the same things other, ordinary people had.

And gradually out of this desire hope came back into his life. It was no longer the hope of losing his own peculiarity. It was a truer, braver hope of finding someone who shared it. It was impossible, Ernie felt, that he should be unique. Somewhere there must be another like himself.

He began to search for that other, and at once lost his sense of aimlessness. He was no longer lonely: wandering all over the city, peering into corners, following each stealthy figure who kept to the shadows, as he did, for fear of being found out.

He was astounded how many there were to follow, how many people there were in New York alone who seemed afraid of showing themselves in the light for one reason or another. But Ernie had no further interest in them once he was sure their reasons were different from his. He was far too ordinary a young man to feel any kinship with the otherwise afflicted. He felt no pity for them even. He abandoned them without a qualm, in fact with a certain contempt, and pressed on in his search.

As part of it he had taken to walking up and down Fourth Avenue during his lunch hour. There were always a good many people around at that time and something about the neighborhood, perhaps the same thing that had first attracted him to it, made him feel particularly hopeful there.

The first time he saw her it was little more than a glimpse. He had become expert by then at spotting stealth in others and his attention was drawn to the girl twenty yards away. She was about his age, tall and slight, with a pale scared face and disheveled hair. He hurried after her at once, but she was hurrying too, dodging in and out of the crowd without ever getting separated from it and avoiding the fronts of buildings in a familiar way. Though he threw aside all caution as he pursued her up the avenue she was too quick for him. He lost her outside the Armory and was late getting back for work.

From then on it was her he was searching for. But it was almost a month before he saw her again, in the same place, and this time she was coming towards him. She was hurrying as before, her white face lowered, her eyes intently watching

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the ground in front of her. Ernie watched it too. She reached an intersection a few yards away and was forced to stop at the curb. The sun shone on her soft brown hair, so carelessly parted at the side. A stream of cars momentarily blocked her from sight. There was a sudden gap between a Buick and a Ford. Ernie's glance swept the street in front of her graceful feet. He almost fainted with joy. It was true: his search was over: he was no longer alone.

She cast no shadow.

He started to run towards her and then checked himself. He had caught that look of shamed fear in her eyes which he had so often felt in his own. She thought herself discovered. He stopped and turned and started back up the avenue, walking now beside her. She glanced at him in panic: she had brown eyes and wore no makeup and was beautiful, he noticed. They walked along a foot apart until they reached the next intersection. The light was against them. It was Ernie's moment to reveal himself to her.

"Look," he whispered. "Look," and pointed to the sunlit ground in front of them.

He had to wait perhaps a second. It seemed like an hour. Then she turned her face to his and her eyes brimmed with tears. He grasped the cold hand hanging by her side.

"You," they both said at once. There was no need for either of them to say more.

It is an adage that opposites attract each other. But there is a kind of love that flowers between the mutually afflicted that is different, gentler, in a way less selfish than any love the more fortunate can know. When one of the disparaged finds another and they fall in love there is a quality to their tenderness, a recognition, a shared gratitude that sets their love apart too.

Her name was Christine. They walked together all that afternoon, still holding hands, uncaring, delighting in the blankness of the sidewalk that stretched before them. They hardly spoke, but by nightfall, when they made their way back to her room, they had interchanged all those secret intimacies that only they — even more than most lovers — could have understood about each other.

They went to her room because it was larger than his, with a wash basin and a four-burner stove, and because Christine seemed to have an even greater fear of public places than Ernie did. That room soon became the only home Ernie had ever known. He was, for a while, marvelously happy there. Christine was a strange shy girl, but he accepted her strangeness as a reflection of his own. It seemed, at first, perfectly natural to him.

He could understand, for instance, her hunger for reassurance. "Do you really think I'm beautiful?" she was forever asking.

"Of course!" Ernie did.

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"Why? I mean, how do I look? To you."

Ernie would tell her, describing her mouth, her nose, her dark and lovely eyes. She never seemed to get tired of having him do this.

"Why don't you look in the mirror?" he teased her once.

But there was no mirror in the room. "It got broken," Christine told him.

"Seven years' bad luck."

She trembled and he put his arms contritely around her. "I didn't mean that. Ah, Christine, you are so beautiful."

She loved, too, to have him comb her hair. It was long and soft and silky and badly cut. She cut it herself. "But I'm terribly clumsy at it," she said. "I never seem to be able to get the parting straight. And I can't bear going to the hairdresser."

He could understand that. He hated it too. With the bright lights overhead and the white sheet around him, his own visits to the barber were a recurrent risk. The trouble was Christine hated going anywhere. She didn't have to work: her mother sent her a check every month on the condition that she stay out of the state of Virginia. She even hated going to the bank to cash it.

It began to get on his nerves a little. Since his discovery that he wasn't unique a change had taken place in Ernie. He was no longer quite so ashamed of his peculiarity. He thought of all the ordinary things he had always longed to do, and now that he had someone like himself to do them with, he longed for them all the more. Besides he was proud of Christine: he wanted to show her off.

They argued about it for hours. It was the cause of their first near quarrel. They made it up at once, but the dissension remained. Until at last one Saturday night when they had been cooped up in the room all day Ernie put his foot down.

"I've had enough of it" he said. "I'm fed up with this never going anywhere. You'd think we were freaks or something. I mean. . . . You know, like midgets. Look, we'll go to one of those dance places where they have flickering lights." He had seen them in the movies. "We'll be perfectly safe."

"Oh, no, please, darling."

"And put some lipstick on." She still never wore makeup.

"Couldn't we just stay here? Please!"

"Come on."

Finally, reluctantly she was forced to give in. She found an old lipstick at the bottom of a trunk and smeared it ineptly on her mouth. She had no compact. Ernie fetched a towel and helped her.

Outside the house they had another near quarrel. This time because Ernie insisted on taking a taxi. He won again. Christine huddled miserably in a corner and when they reached the dance hall peered once with panic stricken eyes up the stairs and refused to go any farther.

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Ernie shrugged and stubbornly led the way. She followed him at a distance like an Arab's wife.

They had neither of them ever learnt to dance. They sat at a table holding hands and watching the couples on the floor. Ernie loved it. He was delighted by the loud bad music and the tawdry glamor. It was just what he had longed for all his life: "to be out with a beautiful girl" — "having a good time" — "just like anyone else." The cliches ran through his mind like an endorsement, adding to his pleasure.

Christine sat tensely by his side and had several drinks to relax her. Unaccustomed to them she began after a while to enjoy herself too. When they left at midnight she felt quite reckless and almost gay.

Ernie joined her in the lobby and helped her on with her coat. She was smiling as they started down the stairs. Several people craned to look at her. Ernie felt a sudden overpowering pride. He noticed that the walls of the stairwell were amber mirrors, deliberately flattering to the dance hall's customers. He caught Christine excitedly by the hand.

"Look, darling," he said. "See for yourself what a handsome couple we make. How beautiful you are." And turned her to face the glass beside them.

She drew quickly back, but not quickly enough. He felt her trying to tear her hand from his and looking in the mirror saw his own pleasantly reflected face, his sharp blue suit and loosely knotted tie.

He dropped her hand as if it had bitten him and watched her run sobbing from him down the stairs. But he didn't go after her.

Ernie suddenly understood! He understood what others had felt about him all his life, his parents' distress and why his schoolmates had first feared and then hated and despised him. He not only understood. In his ordinary way he agreed with them. He saw it all now, for the first time, through their eyes.

When he reached the street he didn't try to find Christine. He walked off towards his own room whistling a superior little tune he had picked up in the dance hall. *How dared she have lied to him like that!* he thought. He and Christine were not commonly different, equally outcast, as she had pretended, at all. And no wonder she had always made such a mess of cutting her own hair.

She not only cast no shadow.

The monstrous, the unnatural girl had no reflection.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITOR

SCIENCE FICTION HAS GOT OFF TO A slow start in 1955. As I write this column, most of January's books have been received, and some of February's; and the total crop is three anthologies, ranging from poor to fine, two paperback novels, both wretched, and two absurd "non-fiction" books about flying saucers. I think we can safely postpone consideration of 1955 till next month, and devote these pages to some of last year's books hitherto overlooked or only briefly cited here.

Two of 1954's all-too-few distinguished novels of science fiction appeared only just in time to be mentioned in last month's "Best" list, and deserve longer notice. F&SF readers know well the adroit talents of Chad Oliver, who was first discovered by this magazine. (Turn to the end of this issue for his latest short story.) SHADOWS IN THE SUN (Ballantine, $2*; paper, 35c) is his first adult novel (he wrote a fine juvenile, MISTS OF DAWN, two years earlier), and clearly establishes him as one of the leading young talents in the field. Or maybe one should strike that word *young;* so marked have been the advances of such writers as Oliver, Anderson and Matheson — along with others who have yet to produce a full-length book, such as Beaumont, Dick and Sheckley — that the "young talents" seem almost to have seized the leadership away from the (relatively) Old Guard. Oliver is a trained professional anthropologist as well as a skilled writer; and he uses his knowledge of anthropological field-techniques to revitalize completely the familiar theme of There-Are-Alien-Observers-Among-Us. I can't think of anyone who has more sensibly and convincingly portrayed members of a highly advanced civilization who are *not* supermen, or who has treated more logically and humanly the problems of one of us in adjusting to such a culture.

The name of Shepherd Mead may well be unfamiliar to s.f. readers — though I hope some of you have read his delightfully acute observations on HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING. Mr. Mead is himself a successful businessman, and a satiric traitor to his executive class; the same devastatingly accurate wit that marked his how-to volume recurs in the form of a science fiction novel in THE BIG BALL OF WAX (Simon & Schuster,

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$3.50*). As a novel, it's good: lively storytelling, fine detailed exposition of a Madison Avenue-dominated future culture. And as a satire it's wonderful: Kornbluth and possibly Vonnegut are the only authors I can think of in the s.f. field who have approached its pertinency and bite.

Other late 1954 novels deserve briefer mention. In YEAR OF CONSENT (Dell, 25c), Kendell Foster Crossen also depicts a government of advertising technicians and develops his background detailedly and intelligently, but weakens the book with an uncompulsive spy-thriller plot, lacking much surprise or suspense. The novel's ingenious extrapolation merits praise; but both Mead and Pohl-Kornbluth (in THE SPACE MERCHANTS) have treated the same theme in better stories. Roger Dee's AN EARTH GONE MAD (Ace, 35c) is routine cosmic melodrama in the manner of a road company van Vogt, far removed from the originality of Dee's best shorter stories. And Donald Suddaby's VILLAGE FANFARE (Oxford University Press, $1.55*) proves that imported British s.f. can be as crude and inept as any home-grown product, despite a fine premise (a time-traveling Observer in Much Swayford, Salop, in the year 1908) that I wish had occurred to a better writer.

Among "pure" fantasy novels, J. R. R. Tolkien's THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING (Houghton Mifflin, $5*) may well be the major achievement of the year or even of the decade. I cautiously say *may* because this 200,000-word titan is only the introductory portion of a trilogy, an unrounded fragment — and a fragment of such weight is a little difficult to assay. Tolkien has gone far beyond his memorable THE HOBBIT (though with many of the same characters) to develop an entire history, mythology and symbolism as complex (and as endless) as Wagner's elaborations upon the legend of another Ring. For wholly created and self-consistent absolute fantasy, written in superb prose and replete with both adventure and humor, the only book even remotely comparable is THE WORM OUROBOROS. In this first section, at least, Tolkien lacks Eddison's depth of characterization and his sense of narrative form; but there are rich treasures of beauty and imagination here for the patient reader. Another fantasy novel highly praised by general reviewers will seem less impressive to the habituated reader. Douglas Wallop's THE YEAR THE YANKEES LOST THE PENNANT (Norton, $2.95*) is just another Pact-with-the-Devil story, somewhat brightened by its Major League baseball setting.

One belatedly received book is hereby added, retroactively, to the Best-of-54 list: Lord Dunsany's THE SWORD OF WELLERAN AND OTHER TALES OF ENCHANTMENT (Devin-Adair, $3*). Here Lord and Lady Dunsany have selected 16 stories from 7 long-out-of-print volumes,

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dating as far back as 1908 — "the stories," we are told, "by which the author most wishes to be remembered." I'm not sure if the wish will be fulfilled; these are stories in Dunsany's early vein of sheer poetic myth-creation, and many readers will continue to remember his dry wit and half-realistic satire in such later stories as the narratives of Jorkens — or indeed the very latest Dunsany tale in this issue. But these fantasy-prose-poems are in their way quite perfect; and the aspiring critic (or writer) could hardly find a better exercise than in analyzing why the title-tale of Welleran is a completely successful epic myth, while Robert E. Howard's not wholly dissimilar adventures of Conan — of which the newest collection is CONAN THE BARBARIAN (Gnome, $3*) — are crude failures.

I'm sorry that the International Fantasy Award committee has dropped its non-fiction prize; it would have been a pleasure to vote for Daniel Lang's THE MAN IN THE THICK LEAD SUIT (Oxford University Press, $3.50*). This *New Yorker* series of essays on the human, personal side of spaceflight and nuclear research — the adjustment of Peenemünde scientists to Texas, the reaction of Las Vegas to the A-bomb, the conversion of a nuclear physicist to the Episcopal ministry — would have been pure science fiction only a decade ago, and of the highest Heinleinesque quality; Eric Sevareid's introduction labels this perceptive reportage as "quietly superb," and I'll go along with that description.

In other non-fiction, John Harden's TAR HEEL GHOSTS (University of North Carolina, $3*) is only passable — largely routine hauntings, indifferently written, but with a few oddly provocative cases. Jack Snow's WHO'S WHO IN OZ (Reilly & Lee, $3.75*) is, however, a *must* for every reader who enjoyed Martin Gardner's recent F&SF articles on Oz and its creator. Mr. Snow and his collaborator (Prof. H. M. Wogglebug, T.E., of course — who else?) offer sketches of every character to appear in any of the 39 Oz books, synopses of all 39 plots, compact biographical notes on every writer and illustrator of the series, and skilled discussion of many arguable points in the chronology and history of Oz. This last aspect causes me to wonder why these deathless chronicles have not attracted a group of enthusiastic amateur scholars similar to the Baker Street Irregulars. If any of you are interested in an informal organization for the purpose of relishing Oz as the BSI do the Canon of Sherlock Holmes, drop me a note and I'll see that it reaches Mr. Snow, who should be the logical focus of such a group.

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*Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered through F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details, see page 2.

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A great many science fiction writers are also editors; it's almost an occupational ailment. But Alan E. Nourse has gone the rest of us one better: he is author, editor and *publisher — founder and proprietor of the Chamberlain Press. And I hope that his mail brings him MSS as attractive as those which F&SF receives from him, such as this simple and touching fantasy of enduring love.*

The Canvas Bag

by ALAN E. NOURSE

THE TELEPHONE JANGLED JUST AS Joe Baker got himself settled in the bathtub. He growled something poisonous, and dashed the length of the rooming house hallway to his bare little room at the end, robe-tails flying, splattering water far and wide as he reached for the offending instrument. Then Jeannie's voice was tinkling in his ear; his annoyance vanished, and his heart skipped twice in dreadful premonition.

Jeannie was laughing. "I must have dragged you out of the shower! You sound like you've hurdled barriers."

"Many barriers," said Joe, slapping at the trickle of water meandering down his leg. His feet were planted in an expanding puddle. "There's nothing wrong — is there?"

"Nothing drastic." Jeannie's voice was warm. "I'll have to be late tonight, is all. Maybe an hour or more — I don't know. Frankie's decided that *this* is the night to finish the inventory. No other night will do. And you know Frankie —"

Joe shook the water out of his ears, and consigned Frankie to the eighth circle of Nether Hell. A chill of disappointment stabbed through him, all out of proportion to the importance of an hour delay in their dinner date. But then, he was sure he heard the same disappointment in Jeannie's voice, and felt somewhat mollified. It was almost as if she knew what a special date it was going to be. "How about nine, then? I'll meet you there."

"We should be finished by then. I'll be hungry, too —"

"Sky's the limit tonight. Even on barriers to hurdle —" He wondered vaguely how a girl who spent all day serving out food could bear to look at it at night — much less eat it.

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Jeannie's laugh was echoing in his ears as he hung up, and blinked sourly around the room. An extra hour to kill, then. He could hardly bear it. It was a rather drab room, with a single window that stared out on the main street catching the hot Indiana sun. Not a bad room, if you liked cheap boarding houses. From the window he could see the whole town before him, and he stared down for a moment or two before turning away, allowing his mind to drift back to his first impression of it the day he'd dropped off the freight car six weeks before.

A grubby little dump town, he had thought. A good place to stop for the night, and then move on. They probably wouldn't favor gentlemen of the road around here, anyway. Nothing unusual, his thinking that — the usual chain of thoughts that went through his mind when he hit a little Midwest town with its dusty streets and its dirty frame houses. It was even an ordinary-looking diner where he had been sitting, perusing the hectographed bill-of-fare when the girl behind the counter had come over, and he had looked up and seen Jeannie. . . .

He gave a little laugh now, and fished clean clothes from the bureau. A starched shirt had always been a trial for Joe; he struggled into it manfully, grinning at himself in the mirror. So very much could happen in six short weeks! One's ideas of towns and people and everything could change so rapidly. He whistled a little tune, regarding his broad tanned face and unkempt brown hair as he whirled the tie. Not a bad face, Joe Baker. Not bad at all. You could see how a gal might go for it. And tonight, she simply *had* to go for it. He'd never asked a girl to marry him before in his whole life. She couldn't refuse, not tonight —

But the thought of marriage made him feel a little strange. It was bound to happen sometime, he had told himself. A man can't tramp the roads forever. Someday the time would come to stop. It had always been some time in the dim, distant future, with Joe. But it wasn't any more. Tonight the time had come —

And then his eye fell on the little blue canvas bag on the floor in the corner.

He blinked at the bag. The bag blinked back at him. He gave a nervous little laugh, and kicked the bag, and it went skidding across the floor.

"Good-bye, Bag," he said gleefully. "I won't need *you* any more. Our drifting days are over. . . ."

For a girl who had inventoried all evening, Jeannie was bright and chipper when Joe met her coming out of the diner. But then, she was one of those curious girls who seem to have totally unlimited energy, and become the more beautiful the wearier they are. She was slender and dark, with wide gray eyes set in a narrow elfin face. Like a queen, Joe thought, as she came down the steps — or at

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least a princess. She kissed him lightly, and he slipped his arm around her as they walked around back to her old coupe. "He's an old tyrant, that Frankie," she was saying.

"Let me take you away from all this," said Joe, gallantly. "Let me take you on the wings of the wind. The Pleasure Palace awaits —"

She laughed, and Joe slipped easily into the driver's seat. "The Spoon for dinner?" Jeannie asked.

"The Spoon! A pox upon the Spoon! This is our night, kiddie — nothing but the best." He looked down at her and kissed her on the nose. "You know that place on the point — down by the bend of the river? Steaks an inch thick, they say, and dancing on the terrace." He slid the car out into the road traffic. "Tonight we celebrate."

"It's very, very expensive, I've heard."

"Eat, drink, and be merry —"

Worry flickered in her gray eyes. "You're — you're not heading out again, are you, Joe?"

He smiled. " 'Fraid not. Not a chance. I'm thinking of retiring from the road."

She snuggled closer and threw her head back happily. "For good?"

"For good."

"Then we *do* have something to celebrate."

The place was crowded when they arrived, but the waiter found them a table for two looking out on the broad river. Across the room the orchestra was playing quietly when they ordered, and then they were in each other's arms, whirling gracefully to the music. It was a strange world for Joe — a warm, soft world of love and sweet smells and great cleanliness, and he could hardly focus his thoughts as she pressed her soft cheek to his. He had missed so much, all these years of drifting from town to town, never satisfied, never stopping. He had waited for years, and now he was sure, beyond doubt, that the long years of waiting had been entirely worth it. "I've got a secret, Jeannie," he whispered as they moved into the shadows of the terrace.

"Don't tell me," she whispered back.

"Why not?"

"Because then it wouldn't be a secret, would it?"

"But some secrets are for two people, they aren't any good for just one." Her ear was inches from his lips. "I love you, Jeannie. Did you know that?"

She nodded.

"I want you to marry me."

He thought he felt her arms tighten for a moment, and they danced silently, close together in a wonderful haze that required no words. But when she turned her face up to him, her eyes were sober and troubled. "Are you sure you want that?" she asked.

"I'm not fooling, Jeannie."

She turned her face away. "Oh, I know you're not, Joe — but do you

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know what you want to do? Do you really want to stop drifting, take a house, settle down for good? Do you really think you could do that?"

"I wouldn't be asking you if I hadn't thought it through, would I?" There was a puzzled note in his voice, and he frowned. Something deep inside him had gone cold, a strange sort of pain he had never felt before. "I've been on the road for a long time, I know; but a man gets tired of drifting after a while. Sooner or later he finds a girl that makes it all seem silly." His words faltered; somehow, he couldn't get the right ones to come out. The coldness in his chest deepened. "Look, Jeannie — the road is a hard life, there isn't any softness or friendship or happiness out there — why would anybody choose it? Why should I ever want to go back?"

He broke off, realizing that he was raising his voice. He blinked at Jeannie in dismay, and she looked away, shaking her head and guiding them back to their seats. She looked up at him strangely. "You don't have to convince me, Joe. *I* believe it." She paused. "I wonder if *you* believe it. . . ."

His voice choked in his throat. "I only know how I feel, and I know it's true. I wouldn't have asked you otherwise."

She nodded, staring at the checkered tablecloth for a long moment. Then she looked him straight in the eyes. "I want you to tell me something, Joe," she said quietly. "I want you to tell me how old you are."

Joe stared at her, and very slowly set down his glass. Something was drumming in his head, a frightful deafening sound that chilled him to the bone. "Why, I'm . . . thirty-ish, or so," he said vaguely, wrinkling his forehead. "Thirty-one, I think, or thirty-two . . . " He blinked at her. "I don't know, it's somewhere around there."

"But can't you *remember*, Joe?" Her eyes were wide.

"Well, of course I can, I suppose! I had a birthday last February —" The drumming in his ears grew louder. "No, that was Pete Hower's birthday. We were on the road together. Funny guy. Pete. he —"

"*Please!*"

A chill ran up his back. It was as if he had suddenly glanced over his shoulder and seen a vast pit opening up behind him. He saw Jeannie's worried face, and he wracked his brains trying to remember, and his mind met with nothing but abysmal blankness. He stared at her in alarm. "Jeannie, *I can't remember!*"

"Oh, Joe! Think! You've got to!"

"But what difference does it make?"

"Joe —" The girl's voice was trembling, close to tears. "Think, Joe. Go back. Back to where you were before you came here, and where you went before that. Here — here's some paper. Write it down. Try to remember, Joe."

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He took the pencil numbly. Slowly, from the drumming in his head things were beginning to creep into his mind, incredible things. "I — I just came East from Fargo six weeks ago," he faltered. "Hopped a freight. Ran into some trouble with the cops and had a fight. And then I'd been in Minot for a while before that —"

"How long?"

"Couple of months. I was working my way East, thought I'd work the docks for a while —"

"And where were you before Minot?"

"Santa Monica. Diving job. I almost got killed — that chilled me on the coast. Came up from San Diego before that — hit Dago on a tramp steamer that had come through the canal from Acapulco. And then before that there was the war. . . ."

A horrible thought flashed through Joe Baker's mind. A fiendish voice was screaming in his ear: *Which war, Joe, which war?*

And then, in a terrifying flash, he remembered. The muddy fog cleared from his mind, and his memory whirled back and back, and his face went white in the dim light of the place.

There was the fighting on Anzio, and the storming of Monte Cassino —

And then there was the girl in Pittsburgh who'd cleaned him out that night at Jardine's — god! that seemed like a century ago! And the logging up in Canada before that —

And the long depression years before that, in the hobo jungles —

And the job he'd lost when his boss went down in the crash —

And the run-in with the Boston cops in that bootlegging deal which couldn't go wrong —

And the cattle-herding jaunt down through Wyoming and Colorado and Oklahoma before that — how long was that trip? Four years? Must have been, with all the time he'd wasted with the girl in Denver —

Joe Baker stared at the girl across the table from him, his mind screaming. He could amost see the blue canvas bag by his side, he could feel the excitement again as he had packed it full, ready for another move, and another, and another. . . . With a sudden horrified rush he picked up the paper and pencil and began scratching down places, times, distances, something clutching in his chest as he wrote:

The mustering out after the armistice, and the long trip home from France —

The days of drifting through Europe after the turn of the century —

The shouting, savage cavalry charges against the Spanish in Cuba —

The bitter hatred of the Kansas farmers when the railroads went through —

The hum of hoofbeats on the Nevada prairie, the wild screams of the Indian raiders —

The crash of artillery, the bitter

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sharp voice of the longrifles at Chickamauga —

He remembered them. He remembered them all.

Joe Baker sat back in his chair, finally, his hands trembling. It was utterly incredible, of course. But it was true. He'd just never thought of it before. He'd drifted — from town to town, from job to job, anywhere the moment seemed to suggest. Drifted, and stopped for a while, and drifted again. He'd never thought of the past, for the past was filled with pain and loneliness, and such things seldom encourage reminiscence. It had simply never occurred to him to stop and think how long he'd drifted, nor what might happen if he ever tried to stop.

And he had drifted for a hundred and fifty years.

He stared at the girl's frightened face. "You knew — somehow you knew —"

She nodded. "I didn't know what it was. I knew you were *different*, somehow. At first I thought it was just that you'd been traveling a long time that it was a part of a personality you'd built up on the road. I felt it the first moment I saw you. And then I began to realize that the difference was something else — But I didn't realize how long you've been going —"

"But my face!" he cried. "My body! How could it be possible? Why is it that I'm not old, shriveled, dead?"

"I don't know."

"But it couldn't happen!"

Jeannie shook her head weakly. "There's something else far more important."

"What's that?"

"What makes you do it."

"I tell you *I don't know.*"

"But you *must* have remembered the time passing!" she burst out.

Joe shook his head. "I just never stopped to think. Why should I have? There've never been friends, or family, or anyone to hang onto along the way. It never mattered what time it was, or what day it was — all that mattered was whether it was winter or summer, whether it was hot or cold, whether I was full or hungry. . . . Jeannie, does it matter now? I love you, I want to stop, now, I want to marry you —"

And then they were dancing again, and she was fighting to hold back the tears, clinging to him like a lost child. "Yes, yes — tomorrow, Joe — we can get the papers. Don't ever go away from me, Joe. Oh, I'm afraid —"

"Don't be, don't be —"

"I can't help it. I'm afraid tomorrow —"

He put a finger to her lips. "Tomorrow we'll get a license. Then we'll be married. I've never wanted to stop before. But I do now, more than anything on Earth. And I will."

The drive back into town was very quiet.

It was very late when he came back to his room. He dreaded to re-

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turn. If there were only something they could *do*, some place to go *now*, while he knew he could! But there was nothing to do until tomorrow, and he was cold with fear. He walked into the room and snapped on the lights and the coldness tightened in his chest.

His eyes fell on the blue canvas bag.

It was old and threadbare and exceedingly dusty. The dust from a thousand long roads, of a thousand countries was ground into its fiber, and it seemed a thing alive, a living entity with a power of its own worn deep into its creases and leatherwork. An ordinary old-fashioned traveling bag, really; over the years he had become attached to it with an unreasoning fondness. It was his home, his only solid, dependable connection with the world through which he had been drifting like a ghost. A sound, sturdy friend, always there, carrying his few possessions. He had tramped miles, once, to recover it when it had been left behind. Once it had been stolen, and he had killed a man to get it back —

And now he hated it.

But even as he looked at it, the drums were beating in his ears again — his own pulse? He didn't know. He stared at the bag, and phantoms began to flicker through his mind, tormenting him. The miles had been long and dusty — but they had been free miles. He had been lonely, desperately lonely — but always, he had been free. And now . . .

He took the bag up on his lap, unzippered it, and watched it fall open into the familiar creases. Once there had been buttons on it, long ago. Now a zipper replaced the buttons — but it was still the same old bag. Inside, there were odds and ends. A pack of cigarettes, slightly mildewed, and an ancient straight-razor. A couple of unused rifle shells, a pair of stick-on rubber soles for his shoes, a shabby torn bandana. Like an overpowering wind the memories filtered through his mind, the call of the road, the long dark nights under the glistening star blanket. And now he would stop, throw away the bag, go off and settle down in a house, take work in the quarry outside town every day. . . . Once stopped, he could never drift again.

The coldness deepened. Nervously he dropped the bag on the floor, kicked it across the room. It was nonsense to think that way. He hated the road and all the loneliness it had meant. He *wouldn't* go back — not with a girl like Jeannie to keep him from ever being lonely again —

The chill grew into panic. He sat down on the bed, trembling. He was afraid. He was fighting now, and a voice was whispering in his ear, *You've got to go, Joe, you can't stop, never, never — run now, before you hurt her any more! You can never stop drifting, Joe* —

He gripped the bedstead until his knuckles turned white. *Why?* He strained his memory, trying to

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think back, trying to remember how it had started, so long ago. It was as though a great hand were pushing him, drawing him toward the canvas bag, urging him to pack it up, take it and race away, like the wind, onto the road again — But he didn't want to go, he wanted a wife, a home —

Home, Joe? You hated your home!

No, no, he thought. A line of sweat was standing out on his upper lip. I didn't I didn't hate it, I was young, I didn't understand, I didn't know —

You threw a curse on your home, Joe. Remember? You screamed it in your mother's face, you reviled her and packed your canvas bag —

I didn't know what I was doing, he thought. I was foolish, I couldn't have known —

But you said it, Joe — remember what you said?

No!

I'll never come home if I live a thousand years —

He clutched at the bag, and his hand anchored on the grip, and he felt it start tugging at him. He let out a cry, and threw it on the floor. Frantically he jerked the telephone from the hook, dialed Jeannie's number, and heard her sleepy voice on the wire. "Jeannie, you've got to help me," he choked. "Come over, please, I can't help myself —"

There had been other times he'd tried. He remembered them, now, horrible struggles that had nearly killed him with torment until he gave up. He had never believed in ghosts and witchcraft and curses, but something was forcing him now, something within him so cold, so dark and powerful that he could never hope to fight it. He sat on the edge of the bed, gritting his teeth, and the voice was crying louder and louder, *you can never stop, Joe, no matter what happens, you'll never have a home again, never, never, never* —

The room was empty when she arrived. She choked back a sob, and closed the door behind her, and leaned exhausted against the wall. She was too late. The dresser drawers were ripped open, a dirty sock lay under the bed, a handkerchief was crumpled on the bureau. He was gone, and so was the canvas bag.

And then her eye fell on a folded white paper on the floor. She picked it up with trembling fingers, and recognized it. With a little cry she plunged it into her pocket, and fled down the front stairs, her coat flying behind her as she ran.

The street was dark and deserted. A street light shone across the street, and another, up near the end of town, made a baleful yellow blotch in the darkness. She ran faster, her heels snapping harshly on the dry pavement, and she turned into a lighted building at the end of the street.

A sleepy clerk looked up at her and blinked. "Was — was a young man in here?"

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The clerk nodded suspiciously. "Bus to Chicago. Getting ready to leave."

She threw her money down, and snatched up the little white ticket. Seconds later she was running down the bus lane to the large coach with CHICAGO across the front. She stumbled up the steps, and then she saw him.

He was sitting near the back, eyes closed, face deathly white. In his arms he was clutching his blue canvas bag, and his whole body was trembling. Slowly she moved back, sank down in the seat beside him. "Oh, Joe, Joe —"

"Jeannie, I'm sorry — I just can't help it —"

"I know, Joe."

He looked at her, his eyes widening. She shook her head, and took his heavy hand in hers. Then he saw the ticket.

"Jeannie —"

"Hush. Don't say it."

"But you don't know what you're doing! We can never have a home, darling — *never*. No matter how hard we try. Think of the long, homeless roads, Jeannie — all over the world, on and on — maybe even to the stars —"

She smiled, nodding gently. "But at least you won't be lonely now."

"Jeannie, *you can't* —"

"I can," she said, and rested her head quietly against his shoulder.

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It's a strange and moving story that Walter Miller has chosen to tell on this his first (and very welcome!) appearance in F&SF. In the background is a bitter history of atomic devastation and of man's deliberate conscious creation of a new Dark Age. But this is no bitter story; for in the foreground stands little Brother Francis of Utah, gentle, humble, fallibly human — and this loving account of his trials glows with the light that must lie at the heart of the Darkest Age.

A Canticle for Leibowitz

by WALTER M. MILLER, JR.

BROTHER FRANCIS GERARD OF UTAH would never have discovered the sacred document, had it not been for the pilgrim with girded loins who appeared during that young monk's Lenten fast in the desert. Never before had Brother Francis actually seen a pilgrim with girded loins, but that this one was the bona fide article he was convinced at a glance. The pilgrim was a spindly old fellow with a staff, a basket hat, and a brushy beard, stained yellow about the chin. He walked with a limp and carried a small waterskin over one shoulder. His loins truly were girded with a ragged piece of dirty burlap, his only clothing except for hat and sandals. He whistled tunelessly on his way.

The pilgrim came shuffling down the broken trail out of the north, and he seemed to be heading toward the Brothers of Leibowitz Abbey six miles to the south. The pilgrim and the monk noticed each other across an expanse of ancient rubble. The pilgrim stopped whistling and stared. The monk, because of certain implications of the rule of solitude for fast days, quickly averted his gaze and continued about his business of hauling large rocks with which to complete the wolf-proofing of his temporary shelter. Somewhat weakened by a ten day diet of cactus fruit, Brother Francis found the work made him exceedingly dizzy; the landscape had been shimmering before his eyes and dancing with black specks, and he was at first uncertain that the bearded apparition was not a mirage induced by hunger, but after a moment it called to him cheerfully, "*Ola allay!*"

It was a pleasant musical voice.

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The rule of silence forbade the young monk to answer, except by smiling shyly at the ground.

"Is this here the road to the abbey?" the wanderer asked.

The novice nodded at the ground and reached down for a chalk-like fragment of stone. The pilgrim picked his way toward him through the rubble. "What you doing with all the rocks?" he wanted to know.

The monk knelt and hastily wrote the words "Solitude & Silence" on a large flat rock, so that the pilgrim — if he could read, which was statistically unlikely — would know that he was making himself an occasion of sin for the penitent and would perhaps have the grace to leave in peace.

"Oh, well," said the pilgrim. He stood there for a moment, looking around, then rapped a certain large rock with his staff. "*That* looks like a handy crag for you," he offered helpfully, then added: "Well, good luck. And may you find a Voice, as y' seek."

Now Brother Francis had no immediate intuition that the stranger meant "Voice" with a capital *V*, but merely assumed that the old fellow had mistaken him for a deaf mute. He glanced up once again as the pilgrim shuffled away whistling, sent a swift silent benediction after him for safe wayfaring, and went back to his rock-work, building a coffin-sized enclosure in which he might sleep at night without offering himself as wolf-bait.

A sky-herd of cumulus clouds, on their way to bestow moist blessings on the mountains after having cruelly tempted the desert, offered welcome respite from the searing sunlight, and he worked rapidly to finish before they were gone again. He punctuated his labors with whispered prayers for the certainty of a true Vocation, for this was the purpose of his inward quest while fasting in the desert.

At last he hoisted the rock which the pilgrim had suggested.

The color of exertion drained quickly from his face. He backed away a step and dropped the stone as if he had uncovered a serpent.

A rusted metal box lay half-crushed in the rubble . . . only a rusted metal box.

He moved toward it curiously, then paused. There were things, and then there were Things. He crossed himself hastily, and muttered brief Latin at the heavens. Thus fortified, he readdressed himself to the box.

"*Apage Satanas!*"

He threatened it with the heavy crucifix of his rosary.

"Depart, O Foul Seductor!"

He sneaked a tiny aspergillum from his robes and quickly spattered the box with holy water before it could realize what he was about.

"If thou be creature of the Devil, begone!"

The box showed no signs of withering, exploding, melting away. It exuded no blasphemous ichor. It

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only lay quietly in its place and allowed the desert wind to evaporate the sanctifying droplets.

"So be it," said the brother, and knelt to extract it from its lodging. He sat down on the rubble and spent nearly an hour battering it open with a stone. The thought crossed his mind that such an archeological relic — for such it obviously was — might be the Heaven-sent sign of his vocation but he suppressed the notion as quickly as it occurred to him. His abbot had warned him sternly against expecting any direct personal Revelation of a spectacular nature. Indeed, he had gone forth from the abbey to fast and do penance for 40 days that he might be rewarded with the inspiration of a calling to Holy Orders, but to expect a vision or a voice crying "Francis, where art thou?" would be a vain presumption. Too many novices had returned from their desert vigils with tales of omens and signs and visions in the heavens, and the good abbot had adopted a firm policy regarding these. Only the Vatican was qualified to decide the authenticity of such things. "An attack of sunstroke is no indication that you are fit to profess the solemn vows of the order," he had growled. And certainly it was true that only rarely did a call from Heaven come through any device other than the *inward* ear, as a gradual congealing of inner certainty.

Nevertheless, Brother Francis found himself handling the old metal box with as much reverence as was possible while battering at it.

It opened suddenly, spilling some of its contents. He stared for a long time before daring to touch, and a cool thrill gathered along his spine. Here was antiquity indeed! And as a student of archeology, he could scarcely believe his wavering vision. Brother Jeris would be frantic with envy, he thought, but quickly repented this unkindness and murmured his thanks to the sky for such a treasure.

He touched the articles gingerly — they were real enough — and began sorting through them. His studies had equipped him to recognize a screwdriver — an instrument once used for twisting threaded bits of metal into wood — and a pair of cutters with blades no longer than his thumbnail, but strong enough to cut soft bits of metal or bone. There was an odd tool with a rotted wooden handle and a heavy copper tip to which a few flakes of molten lead had adhered, but he could make nothing of it. There was a toroidal roll of gummy black stuff, too far deteriorated by the centuries for him to identify, There were strange bits of metal, broken glass, and an assortment of tiny tubular things with wire whiskers of the type prized by the hill pagans as charms and amulets, but thought by some archeologists to be remnants of the legendary *machina analytica*, supposedly dating back to the Deluge of Flame.

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All these and more he examined carefully and spread on the wide flat stone. The documents he saved until last. The documents, as always, were the real prize, for so few papers had survived the angry bonfires of the Age of Simplification, when even the sacred writings had curled and blackened and withered into smoke while ignorant crowds howled vengence.

Two large folded papers and three hand-scribbled notes constituted his find. All were cracked and brittle with age, and he handled them tenderly, shielding them from the wind with his robe. They were scarcely legible and scrawled in the hasty characters of pre-Deluge English — a tongue now used, together with Latin, only by monastics and in the Holy Ritual. He spelled it out slowly, recognizing words but uncertain of meanings. One note said: *Pound pastrami, can kraut, six bagels, for Emma.* Another ordered: *Don't forget to pick up form 1040 for Uncle Revenue.* The third note was only a column of figures with a circled total from which another amount was subtracted and finally a percentage taken, followed by the word *damn!* From this he could deduce nothing, except to check the arithmetic, which proved correct.

Of the two larger papers, one was tightly rolled and began to fall to pieces when he tried to open it; he could make out the words RACING FORM, but nothing more. He laid it back in the box for later restorative work.

The second large paper was a single folded sheet, whose creases were so brittle that he could only inspect a little of it by parting the folds and peering between them as best he could.

A diagram . . . a web of white lines on dark paper!

Again the cool thrill gathered along his spine. It was a *blueprint* — that exceedingly rare class of ancient document most prized by students of antiquity, and usually most challenging to interpreters and searchers for meaning.

And, as if the find itself were not enough of a blessing, among the words written in a block at the lower corner of the document was the name of the founder of his order — of the Blessed Leibowitz *himself!*

His trembling hands threatened to tear the paper in their happy agitation. The parting words of the pilgrim tumbled back to him: "May you find a Voice, as y' seek." Voice indeed, with *V* capitalized and formed by the wings of a descending dove and illuminated in three colors against a background of gold leaf. *V* as in *Vere dignum* and *Vidi aquam*, at the head of a page of the Missal. *V*, he saw quite clearly, as in Vocation.

He stole another glance to make certain it was so, then breathed, "*Beate Leibowitz, ora pro me. . . . Sancte Leibowitz, exaudi me,*" the

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second invocation being a rather daring one, since the founder of his order had not yet been declared a saint.

Forgetful of his abbot's warning, he climbed quickly to his feet and stared across the shimmering terrain to the south in the direction taken by the old wanderer of the burlap loincloth. But the pilgrim had long since vanished. Surely an angel of God, if not the Blessed Leibowitz himself, for had he not revealed this miraculous treasure by pointing out the rock to be moved and murmuring that prophetic farewell?

Brother Francis stood basking in his awe until the sun lay red on the hills and evening threatened to engulf him in its shadows. At last he stirred, and reminded himself of the wolves. His gift included no guarantee of charismata for subduing the wild beast, and he hastened to finish his enclosure before darkness fell on the desert. When the stars came out, he rekindled his fire and gathered his daily repast of the small purple cactus fruit, his only nourishment except the handful of parched corn brought to him by the priest each Sabbath. Sometimes he found himself staring hungrily at the lizards which scurried over the rocks, and was troubled by gluttonous nightmares.

But tonight his hunger was less troublesome than an impatient urge to run back to the abbey and announce his wondrous encounter to his brethren. This, of course, was unthinkable. Vocation or no, he must remain here until the end of Lent, and continue as if nothing extraordinary had occurred.

A cathedral will be built upon this site, he thought dreamily as he sat by the fire. He could see it rising from the rubble of the ancient village, magnificent spires visible for miles across the desert. . . .

But cathedrals were for teeming masses of people. The desert was home for only scattered tribes of huntsmen and the monks of the abbey. He settled in his dreams for a shrine, attracting rivers of pilgrims with girded loins. . . . He drowsed. When he awoke, the fire was reduced to glowing embers. Something seemed amiss. Was he quite alone? He blinked about at the darkness.

From beyond the bed of reddish coals, the dark wolf blinked back. The monk yelped and dived for cover.

The yelp, he decided as he lay trembling within his den of stones, had not been a serious breach of the rule of silence. He lay hugging the metal box and praying for the days of Lent to pass swiftly, while the sound of padded feet scratched about the enclosure.

Each night the wolves prowled about his camp, and the darkness was full of their howling. The days were glaring nightmares of hunger, heat, and scorching sun.

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He spent them at prayer and wood-gathering, trying to suppress his impatience for the coming of Holy Saturday's high noon, the end of Lent and of his vigil.

But when at last it came, Brother Francis found himself too famished for jubilation. Wearily he packed his pouch, pulled up his cowl against the sun, and tucked his precious box beneath one arm. Thirty pounds lighter and several degrees weaker than he had been on Ash Wednesday, he staggered the six mile stretch to the abbey where he fell exhausted before its gates. The brothers who carried him in and bathed him and shaved him and anointed his desiccated tissues reported that he babbled incessantly in his delirium about an apparition in a burlap loincloth, addressing it at times as an angel and again as a saint, frequently invoking the name of Leibowitz and thanking him for a revelation of sacred relics and a racing form.

Such reports filtered through the monastic congregation and soon reached the ears of the abbot, whose eyes immediately narrowed to slits and whose jaw went rigid with the rock of policy.

"Bring him," growled that worthy priest in a tone that sent a recorder scurrying.

The abbot paced and gathered his ire. It was not that he objected to miracles, as such, if duly investigated, certified, and sealed; for miracles — even though always incompatible with administrative efficiency, and the abbot was administrator as well as priest — were the bedrock stuff on which his faith was founded. But last year there had been Brother Noyen with his miraculous hangman's noose, and the year before that, Brother Smirnôv who had been mysteriously cured of the gout upon handling a probable relic of the Blessed Leibowitz, and the year before that . . . *Faugh!* The incidents had been too frequent and outrageous to tolerate. Ever since Leibowitz' beatification, the young fools had been sniffing around after shreds of the miraculous like a pack of good-natured hounds scratching eagerly at the back gate of Heaven for scraps.

It was quite understandable, but also quite unbearable. Every monastic order is eager for the canonization of its founder, and delighted to produce any bit of evidence to serve the cause in advocacy. But the abbot's flock was getting out of hand, and their zeal for miracles was making the Albertian Order of Leibowitz a laughing stock at New Vatican. He had determined to make any new bearers of miracles suffer the consequences, either as a punishment for impetuous and impertinent credulity, or as payment in penance for a gift of grace in case of later verification.

By the time the young novice knocked at his door, the abbot had projected himself into the desired

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state of carnivorous expectancy beneath a bland exterior.

"Come in, my son," he breathed softly.

"You sent for . . ." The novice paused, smiling happily as he noticed the familiar metal box on the abbot's table. ". . . for me, Father Juan?" he finished.

"Yes . . ." The abbot hesitated. His voice smiled with a withering acid, adding: "Or perhaps you would prefer that I come *to you*, hereafter, since you've become such a famous personage."

"Oh, no, Father!" Brother Francis reddened and gulped.

"You are seventeen, and plainly an idiot."

"That is undoubtedly true, Father."

"What improbable excuse can you propose for your outrageous vanity in believing yourself fit for Holy Orders?"

"I can offer none, my ruler and teacher. My sinful pride is unpardonable."

"To imagine that it is so great as to be unpardonable is even a vaster vanity," the priest roared.

"Yes, Father. I am indeed a worm."

The abbot smiled icily and resumed his watchful calm. "And you are now ready to deny your feverish ravings about an angel appearing to reveal to you this . . ." He gestured contemptuously at the box. ". . . this assortment of junk?"

Brother Francis gulped and closed his eyes. "I — I fear I cannot deny it, my master."

"What?"

"I cannot deny what I have seen, Father."

"Do you know what is going to happen to you now?"

"Yes, Father."

"Then prepare to take it!"

With a patient sigh, the novice gathered up his robes about his waist and bent over the table. The good abbot produced his stout hickory ruler from the drawer and whacked him soundly ten times across the bare buttocks. After each whack, the novice dutifully responded with a "*Deo Gratias!*" for this lesson in the virtue of humility.

"Do you *now* retract it?" the abbot demanded as he rolled down his sleeve.

"Father, I cannot."

The priest turned his back and was silent for a moment. "Very well," he said tersely. "Go. But do not expect to profess your solemn vows this season with the others."

Brother Francis returned to his cell in tears. His fellow novices would join the ranks of the professed monks of the order, while he must wait another year — and spend another Lenten season among the wolves in the desert, seeking a vocation which he felt had already been granted to him quite emphatically. As the weeks passed, however, he found some satisfaction in noticing that Father Juan had not been

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entirely serious in referring to his find as "an assortment of junk." The archeological relics aroused considerable interest among the brothers, and much time was spent at cleaning the tools, classifying them, restoring the documents to a pliable condition, and attempting to ascertain their meaning. It was even whispered among the novices that Brother Francis had discovered true relics of the Blessed Leibowitz — especially in the form of the blueprint bearing the legend OP COBBLESTONE, REQ LEIBOWITZ & HARDIN, which was stained with several brown splotches which might have been his blood — or equally likely, as the abbot pointed out, might be stains from a decayed apple core. But the print was dated in the Year of Grace 1956, which was — as nearly as could be determined — during that venerable man's lifetime, a lifetime now obscured by legend and myth, so that it was hard to determine any but a few facts about the man.

It was said that God, in order to test mankind, had commanded wise men of that age, among them the Blessed Leibowitz, to perfect diabolic weapons and give them into the hands of latter-day Pharaohs. And with such weapons Man had, within the span of a few weeks, destroyed most of his civilization and wiped out a large part of the population. After the Deluge of Flame came the plagues, the madness, and the bloody inception of the Age of Simplification when the furious remnants of humanity had torn politicians, technicians, and men of learning limb from limb, and burned all records that might contain information that could once more lead into paths of destruction. Nothing had been so fiercely hated as the written word, the learned man. It was during this time that the word *simpleton* came to mean *honest, upright, virtuous citizen*, a concept once denoted by the term *common man.*

To escape the righteous wrath of the surviving simpletons, many scientists and learned men fled to the only sanctuary which would try to offer them protection. Holy Mother Church received them, vested them in monks' robes, tried to conceal them from the mobs. Sometimes the sanctuary was effective; more often it was not. Monastaries were invaded, records and sacred books were burned, refugees seized and hanged. Leibowitz had fled to the Cistercians, professed their vows, become a priest, and after twelve years had won permission from the Holy See to found a new monastic order to be called "the Albertians," after St. Albert the Great, teacher of Aquinas and patron saint of scientists. The new order was to be dedicated to the preservation of knowledge, secular and sacred, and the duty of the brothers was to memorize such books and papers as could be smuggled to them from all parts of the

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world. Leibowitz was at last identified by simpletons as a former scientist, and was martyred by hanging; but the order continued, and when it became safe again to possess written documents, many books were transcribed from memory. Precedence, however, had been given to sacred writings, to history, the humanities, and social sciences — since the memories of the memorizers were limited, and few of the brothers were trained to understand the physical sciences. From the vast store of human knowledge, only a pitiful collection of hand-written books remained.

Now, after six centuries of darkness, the monks still preserved it, studied it, re-copied it, and waited. It mattered not in the least to them that the knowledge they saved was useless — and some of it even incomprehensible. The knowledge was there, and it was their duty to save it, and it would still be with them if the darkness in the world lasted ten thousand years.

Brother Francis Gerard of Utah returned to the desert the following year and fasted again in solitude. Once more he returned, weak and emaciated, to be confronted by the abbot, who demanded to know if he claimed further conferences with members of the Heavenly Host, or was prepared to renounce his story of the previous year.

"I cannot help what I have seen, my teacher," the lad repeated.

Once more did the abbot chastise him in Christ, and once more did he postpone his profession. The document, however, had been forwarded to a seminary for study, after a copy had been made. Brother Francis remained a novice, and continued to dream wistfully of the shrine which might someday be built upon the site of his find.

"Stubborn boy!" fumed the abbot. "Why didn't somebody else see his silly pilgrim, if the slovenly fellow was heading for the abbey as he said? One more escapade for the Devil's Advocate to cry hoax about. Burlap loincloth indeed!"

The burlap had been troubling the abbot, for tradition related that Leibowitz had been hanged with a burlap bag for a hood.

Brother Francis spent seven years in the novitiate, seven Lenten vigils in the desert, and became highly proficient in the imitation of wolf-calls. For the amusement of his brethren, he would summon the pack to the vicinity of the abbey by howling from the walls after dark. By day, he served in the kitchen, scrubbed the stone floors, and continued his studies of the ancients.

Then one day a messenger from the seminary came riding to the abbey on an ass, bearing tidings of great joy. "It is known," said the messenger, "that the documents found near here are authentic as to date of origin, and that the blueprint was somehow connected with your founder's work. It's being sent

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to New Vatican for further study."

"Possibly a true relic of Leibowitz, then?" the abbot asked calmly.

But the messenger could not commit himself to that extent, and only raised a shrug of one eyebrow. "It is said that Leibowitz was a widower at the time of his ordination. If the name of his deceased wife could be discovered . . ."

The abbot recalled the note in the box concerning certain articles of food for a woman, and he too shrugged an eyebrow.

Soon afterwards, he summoned Brother Francis into his presence. "My boy," said the priest, actually beaming. "I believe the time has come for you to profess your solemn vows. And may I commend you for your patience and persistence. We shall speak no more of your, ah . . . encounter with the ah desert wanderer. You are a good simpleton. You may kneel for my blessing, if you wish."

Brother Francis sighed and fell forward in a dead faint. The abbot blessed him and revived him, and he was permitted to profess the solemn vows of the Albertian Brothers of Leibowitz, swearing himself to perpetual poverty, chastity, obedience, and observance of the rule.

Soon afterwards, he was assigned to the copying room, apprentice under an aged monk named Horner, where he would undoubtedly spend the rest of his days illuminating the pages of algebra texts with patterns of olive leaves and cheerful cherubim.

"You have five hours a week," croaked his aged overseer, "which you may devote to an approved project of your own choosing, if you wish. If not, the time will be assigned to copying the *Summa Theologica* and such fragmentary copies of the Brittanica as exist."

The young monk thought it over, then asked: "May I have the time for elaborating a beautiful copy of the Leibowitz blueprint?"

Brother Horner frowned doubtfully. "I don't know, son — our good abbot is rather sensitive on this subject. I'm afraid . . ."

Brother Francis begged him earnestly.

"Well, perhaps," the old man said reluctantly. "It seems like a rather brief project, so — I'll permit it."

The young monk selected the finest lambskin available and spent many weeks curing it and stretching it and stoning it to a perfect surface, bleached to a snowy whiteness. He spent more weeks at studying copies of his precious document in every detail, so that he knew each tiny line and marking in the complicated web of geometric markings and mystifying symbols. He pored over it until he could see the whole amazing complexity with his eyes closed. Additional weeks were spent searching painstakingly through the monastery's library for any information at all that might lead to some glimmer of understanding of the design.

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Brother Jeris, a young monk who worked with him in the copy room and who frequently teased him about miraculous encounters in the desert, came to squint at it over his shoulder and asked: "What, pray, is the meaning of *Transistorized Control System for Unit Six-B?*"

"Clearly, it is the name of the thing which this diagram represents," said Francis, a trifle crossly since Jeris had merely read the title of the document aloud.

"Surely," said Jeris. "But what is the thing the diagram represents?"

"The transistorized control system for unit six-B, obviously."

Jeris laughed mockingly.

Brother Francis reddened. "I should imagine," said he, "that it represents an abstract concept, rather than a concrete *thing*. It's clearly not a recognizable picture of an object, unless the form is so stylized as to require special training to see it. In my opinion, *Transistorized Control System* is some high abstraction of transcendental value."

"Pertaining to what field of learning?" asked Jeris, still smiling smugly.

"Why . . ." Brother Francis paused. "Since our Beatus Leibowitz was an electronicist prior to his profession and ordination, I suppose the concept applies to the lost art called *electronics*."

"So it is written. But what was the subject matter of that art, Brother?"

"That too is written. The subject matter of electronics was the Electron, which one fragmentary source defines as a Negative Twist of Nothingness."

"I am impressed by your astuteness," said Jeris. "Now perhaps you can tell me how to negate nothingness?"

Brother Francis reddened slightly and squirmed for a reply.

"A negation of nothingness should yield somethingness, I suppose," Jeris continued. "So the Electron must have been a twist of *something*. Unless the negation applies to the 'twist,' and then we would be 'Untwisting Nothing,' eh?" He chuckled. "How clever they must have been, these ancients. I suppose if you keep at it, Francis, you will learn how to untwist a nothing, and then we shall have the Electron in our midst. Where would we put it? On the high altar, perhaps?"

"I couldn't say," Francis answered stiffly. "But I have a certain faith that the Electron must have existed at one time, even though I can't say how it was constructed or what it might have been used for."

The iconoclast laughed mockingly and returned to his work. The incident saddened Francis, but did not turn him from his devotion to his project.

As soon as he had exhausted the library's meager supply of information concerning the lost art of the Albertians' founder, he began preparing preliminary sketches of the designs he meant to use on the lambskin. The diagram itself, since its meaning was obscure, would be

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redrawn precisely as it was in the blueprint, and penned in coal-black lines. The lettering and numbering, however, he would translate into a more decorative and colorful script than the plain block letters used by the ancients. And the text contained in a square block marked SPECIFICATIONS would be distributed pleasingly around the borders of the document, upon scrolls and shields supported by doves and cherubim. He would make the black lines of the diagram less stark and austere by imagining the geometric tracery to be a trellis, and decorate it with green vines and golden fruit, birds and perhaps a wily serpent. At the very top would be a representation of the Triune God, and at the bottom the coat of arms of the Albertian Order. Thus was the Transistorized Control System of the Blessed Leibowitz to be glorified and rendered appealing to the eye as well as to the intellect.

When he had finished the preliminary sketch, he showed it shyly to Brother Horner for suggestions or approval. "I can see," said the old man a bit remorsefully, "that your project is not to be as brief as I had hoped. But . . . continue with it anyhow. The design is beautiful, beautiful indeed."

"Thank you, Brother."

The old man leaned close to wink confidentially. "I've heard the case for Blessed Leibowitz' canonization has been speeded up, so possibly our dear abbot is less troubled by you-know-what than he previously was."

The news of the speed-up was, of course, happily received by all monastics of the order. Leibowitz' beatification had long since been effected, but the final step in declaring him to be a saint might require many more years, even though the case was underway; and indeed there was the possibility that the Devil's Advocate might uncover evidence to prevent the canonization from occurring at all.

Many months after he had first conceived the project, Brother Francis began actual work on the lambskin. The intricacies of scrollwork, the excruciatingly delicate work of inlaying the gold leaf, the hair-fine detail, made it a labor of years; and when his eyes began to trouble him, there were long weeks when he dared not touch it at all for fear of spoiling it with one little mistake. But slowly, painfully, the ancient diagram was becoming a blaze of beauty. The brothers of the abbey gathered to watch and murmur over it, and some even said that the inspiration of it was proof enough of his alleged encounter with the pilgrim who might have been Blessed Leibowitz.

"I can't see why you don't spend your time on a *useful* project," was Brother Jeris' comment, however. The skeptical monk had been using his own free-project time to make and decorate sheepskin shades for the oil lamps in the chapel.

Brother Horner, the old master

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copyist, had fallen ill. Within weeks, it became apparent that the well-loved monk was on his deathbed. In the midst of the monastery's grief, the abbot quietly appointed Brother Jeris as master of the copy room.

A Mass of Burial was chanted early in Advent, and the remains of the holy old man were committed to the earth of their origin. On the following day, Brother Jeris informed Brother Francis that he considered it about time for him to put away the things of a child and start doing a man's work. Obediently, the monk wrapped his precious project in parchment, protected it with heavy board, shelved it, and began producing sheepskin lampshades. He made no murmur of protest, and contented himself with realizing that someday the soul of Brother Jeris would depart by the same road as that of Brother Horner, to begin the life for which this copy room was but the staging ground; and afterwards, please God, he might be allowed to complete his beloved document.

Providence, however, took an earlier hand in the matter. During the following summer, a monsignor with several clerks and a donkey train came riding into the abbey and announced that he had come from New Vatican, as Leibowitz advocate in the canonization proceedings, to investigate such evidence as the abbey could produce that might have bearing on the case, including an alleged apparition of the beatified which had come to one Francis Gerard of Utah.

The gentleman was warmly greeted, quartered in the suite reserved for visiting prelates, lavishly served by six young monks responsive to his every whim, of which he had very few. The finest wines were opened, the huntsman snared the plumpest quail and chaparral cocks, and the advocate was entertained each evening by fiddlers and a troupe of clowns, although the visitor persisted in insisting that life go on as usual at the abbey.

On the third day of his visit, the abbot sent for Brother Francis "Monsignor di Simone wishes to see you," he said. "If you let your imagination run away with you, boy, we'll use your gut to string a fiddle, feed your carcass to the wolves, and bury the bones in unhallowed ground. Now get along and see the good gentleman."

Brother Francis needed no such warning. Since he had awakened from his feverish babblings after his first Lenten fast in the desert, he had never mentioned the encounter with the pilgrim except when asked about it, nor had he allowed himself to speculate any further concerning the pilgrim's identity. That the pilgrim might be a matter for high ecclesiastical concern frightened him a little, and his knock was timid at the monsignor's door.

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His fright proved unfounded. The monsignor was a suave and diplomatic elder who seemed keenly interested in the small monk's career.

"Now about your encounter with our blessed founder," he said after some minutes of preliminary amenities.

"Oh, but I never said he was our Blessed Leibo —"

"Of course you didn't, my son. Now I have here an account of it, as gathered from other sources, and I would like you to read it, and either confirm it or correct it." He paused to draw a scroll from his case and handed it to Francis. "The sources for this version, of course, had it on hearsay only," he added, "and only *you* can describe it first hand, so I want you to edit it *most* scrupulously."

"Of course. What happened was really very simple, Father."

But it was apparent from the fatness of the scroll that the hearsay account was not so simple. Brother Francis read with mounting apprehension which soon grew to the proportions of pure horror.

"You look white, my son. Is something wrong?" asked the distinguished priest.

"This . . . this . . . it wasn't like this *at all!*" gasped Francis. "He didn't say more than a few words to me. I only saw him once. He just asked me the way to the abbey and tapped the rock where I found the relics."

"No heavenly choir?"

"Oh, no!"

"And it's not true about the nimbus and the carpet of roses that grew up along the road where he walked?"

"As God is my judge, nothing like that happened at all!"

"Ah, well," sighed the advocate. "Travelers' stories are always exaggerated."

He seemed saddened, and Francis hastened to apologize, but the advocate dismissed it as of no great importance to the case. "There are other miracles, carefully documented," he explained, "and anyway — there is one bit of good news about the documents you discovered. We've unearthed the name of the wife who died before our founder came to the order."

"Yes?"

"Yes. It was Emily."

Despite his disappointment with Brother Francis' account of the pilgrim, Monsignor di Simone spent five days at the site of the find. He was accompanied by an eager crew of novices from the abbey, all armed with picks and shovels. After extensive digging, the advocate returned with a small assortment of additional artifacts, and one bloated tin can that contained a desiccated mess which might once have been saurkraut.

Before his departure, he visited the copy room and asked to see Brother Francis' copy of the famous blueprint. The monk protested that it was really nothing, and produced

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it with such eagerness his hands trembled.

"Zounds!" said the monsignor, or an oath to such effect. "Finish it, man, finish it!"

The monk looked smilingly at Brother Jeris. Brother Jeris swiftly turned away; the back of his neck gathered color. The following morning, Francis resumed his labors over the illuminated blueprint, with gold leaf, quills, brushes, and dyes.

And then came another donkey train from New Vatican, with a full complement of clerks and armed guards for defense against highwaymen, this time headed by a monsignor with small horns and pointed fangs (or so several novices would later have testified), who announced that he was the *Advocatus Diaboli*, opposing Leibowitz' canonization, and he was here to investigate — and perhaps fix responsibility, he hinted — for a number of incredible and hysterical rumors filtering out of the abbey and reaching even high officials at New Vatican. He made it clear that he would tolerate no romantic nonsense.

The abbot greeted him politely and offered him an iron cot in a cell with a south exposure, after apologizing for the fact that the guest suite had been recently exposed to smallpox. The monsignor was attended by his own staff, and ate mush and herbs with the monks in refectory.

"I understand you are susceptible to fainting spells," he told Brother Francis when the dread time came. "How many members of your family have suffered from epilepsy or madness?"

"None, Excellency."

"I'm not an 'Excellency,'" snapped the priest. "Now we're going to get the truth out of you." His tone implied that he considered it to be a simple straightforward surgical operation which should have been performed years ago.

"Are you aware that documents can be aged artificially?" he demanded.

Francis was not so aware.

"Did you know that Leibowitz' wife was named Emily, and that Emma is *not* a diminutive for Emily?"

Francis had not known it, but recalled from childhood that his own parents had been rather careless about what they called each other. "And if Blessed Leibowitz chose to call her Emma, then I'm sure . . ."

The monsignor exploded, and tore into Francis with semantic tooth and nail, and left the bewildered monk wondering whether he had ever really seen a pilgrim at all.

Before the advocate's departure, he too asked to see the illuminated copy of the print, and this time the monk's hands trembled with fear as he produced it, for he might again be forced to quit the project. The monsignor only stood gazing at it however, swallowed slightly,

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and forced himself to nod. "Your imagery is vivid," he admitted, "but then, of course, we all knew that, didn't we?"

The monsignor's horns immediately grew shorter by an inch, and he departed the same evening for New Vatican.

The years flowed smoothly by, seaming the faces of the once young and adding gray to the temples. The perpetual labors of the monastery continued, supplying a slow trickle of copied and re-copied manuscript to the outside world. Brother Jeris developed ambitions of building a printing press, but when the abbot demanded his reasons, he could only reply, "So we can mass-produce."

"Oh? And in a world that's smug in its illiteracy, what do you intend to do with the stuff? Sell it as kindling paper to the peasants?" – Brother Jeris shrugged unhappily, and the copy room continued with pot and quill.

Then one Spring, shortly before Lent, a messenger arrived with glad tidings for the order. The case for Leibowitz was complete. The College of Cardinals would soon convene, and the founder of the Albertian Order would be enrolled in the Calendar of Saints. During the time of rejoicing that followed the announcement, the abbot — now withered and in his dotage — summoned Brother Francis into his presence, and wheezed:

"His Holiness commands your presence during the canonization of Isaac Edward Leibowitz. Prepare to leave.

"Now don't faint on me again," he added querulously.

The trip to New Vatican would take at least three months, perhaps longer, the time depending on how far brother Francis could get before the inevitable robber band relieved him of his ass, since he would be going unarmed and alone. He carried with him only a begging bowl and the illuminated copy of the Leibowitz print, praying that ignorant robbers would have no use for the latter. As a precaution, however, he wore a black patch over his right eye, for the peasants, being a superstitious lot, could often be put to flight by even a hint of the evil eye. Thus armed and equipped, he set out to obey the summons of his high priest.

Two months and some odd days later he met his robber on a mountain trail that was heavily wooded and far from any settlement. His robber was a short man, but heavy as a bull, with a glazed knob of a pate and a jaw like a block of granite. He stood in the trail with his legs spread wide and his massive arms folded across his chest, watching the approach of the little figure on the ass. The robber seemed alone, and armed only with a knife which he did not bother to remove from his belt thong. His appearance was a disappointment, since Francis had

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been secretly hoping for another encounter with the pilgrim of long ago.

"Get off," said the robber.

The ass stopped in the path. Brother Francis tossed back his cowl to reveal the eye-patch, and raised a trembling finger to touch it. He began to lift the patch slowly as if to reveal something hideous that might be hidden beneath it. The robber threw back his head and laughed a laugh that might have sprung from the throat of Satan himself. Francis muttered an exorcism, but the robber seemed untouched.

"You black-sacked jeebers wore that one out years ago," he said. "Get off."

Francis smiled, shrugged, and dismounted without protest.

"A good day to you, sir," he said pleasantly. "You may take the ass. Walking will improve my health, I think." He smiled again and started away.

"Hold it," said the robber. "Strip to the buff. And let's see what's in that package."

Brother Francis touched his begging bowl and made a helpless gesture, but this brought only another scornful laugh from the robber.

"I've seen that alms-pot trick before too," he said. "The last man with a begging bowl had half a heklo of gold in his boot. Now strip."

Brother Francis displayed his sandals, but began to strip. The robber searched his clothing, found nothing, and tossed it back to him.

"Now let's see inside the package."

"It is only a document, sir," the monk protested. "Of value to no one but its owner."

"Open it."

Silently Brother Francis obeyed. The gold leaf and the colorful design flashed brilliantly in the sunlight that filtered through the foliage. The robber's craggy jaw dropped an inch. He whistled softly.

"What a pretty! Now wouldn't me woman like it to hang on the shanty wall!"

He continued to stare while the monk went slowly sick inside. *If Thou hast sent him to test me, O Lord,* he pleaded inwardly, *then help me to die like a man, for he'll get it over the dead body of Thy servant, if take it he must.*

"Wrap it up for me," the robber commanded, clamping his jaw in sudden decision.

The monk whimpered softly. "Please, sir, you would not take the work of a man's lifetime. I spent fifteen years illuminating this manuscript, and . . ."

"Well! Did it yourself, did you?" The robber threw back his head and howled again.

Francis reddened. "I fail to see the humor, sir . . ."

The robber pointed at it between guffaws. "You! Fifteen years to make a paper bauble. So that's what you do. Tell me why. Give me one good reason. For fifteen years. Ha!"

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Francis stared at him in stunned silence and could think of no reply that would appease his contempt.

Gingerly, the monk handed it over. The robber took it in both hands and made as if to rip it down the center.

"*Jesus, Mary, Joseph!*" the monk screamed, and went to his knees in the trail. "For the love of God, sir!"

Softening slightly, the robber tossed it on the ground with a snicker. "Wrestle you for it."

"Anything, sir, anything!"

They squared off. The monk crossed himself and recalled that wrestling had once been a divinely sanctioned sport — and with grim faith, he marched into battle.

Three seconds later, he lay groaning on the flat of his back under a short mountain of muscle. A sharp rock seemed to be severing his spine.

"Heh heh," said the robber, and arose to claim his document.

Hands folded as if in prayer, Brother Francis scurried after him on his knees, begging at the top of his lungs.

The robber turned to snicker. "I believe you'd kiss a boot to get it back."

Francis caught up with him and fervently kissed his boot.

This proved too much for even such a firm fellow as the robber. He flung the manuscript down again with a curse and climbed aboard the monk's donkey. The monk snatched up the precious document and trotted along beside the robber, thanking him profusely and blessing him repeatedly while the robber rode away on the ass. Francis sent a glowing cross of benediction after the departing figure and praised God for the existence of such selfless robbers.

And yet when the man had vanished among the trees, he felt an aftermath of sadness. Fifteen years to make a paper bauble . . . The taunting voice still rang in his ears. Why? Tell one good reason for fifteen years.

He was unaccustomed to the blunt ways of the outside world, to its harsh habits and curt attitudes. He found his heart deeply troubled by the mocking words, and his head hung low in the cowl as he plodded along. At one time he considered tossing the document in the brush and leaving it for the rains — but Father Juan had approved his taking it as a gift, and he could not come with empty hands. Chastened, he traveled on.

The hour had come. The ceremony surged about him as a magnificent spectacle of sound and stately movement and vivid color in the majestic basilica. And when the perfectly infallible Spirit had finally been invoked, a monsignor — it was di Simone, Francis noticed, the advocate for the saint — arose and called upon Peter to speak, through the person of Leo XXII, commanding the assemblage to hearken.

Whereupon, the Pope quietly

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proclaimed that Isaac Edward Leibowitz was a saint, and it was finished. The ancient and obscure technician was of the heavenly hagiarchy, and Brother Francis breathed a dutiful prayer to his new patron as the choir burst into the *Te Deum*.

The Pontiff strode quickly into the audience room where the little monk was waiting, taking Brother Francis by surprise and rendering him briefly speechless. He knelt quickly to kiss the Fisherman's ring and receive the blessing. As he arose, he found himself clutching the beautiful document behind him as if ashamed of it. The Pope's eyes caught the motion, and he smiled.

"You have brought us a gift, our son?" he asked.

The monk gulped, nodded stupidly, and brought it out. Christ's Vicar stared at it for a long time without apparent expression. Brother Francis' heart went sinking deeper as the seconds drifted by.

"It is a nothing," he blurted, "a miserable gift. I am ashamed to have wasted so much time at : . ." He choked off.

The Pope seemed not to hear him. "Do you understand the meaning of Saint Isaac's symbology?" he asked, peering curiously at the abstract design of the circuit.

Dumbly the monk shook his head.

"Whatever it means . . ." the Pope began, but broke off. He smiled and spoke of other things. Francis had been so honored not because of any official judgment concerning his pilgrim. He had been honored for his role in bringing to light such important documents and relics of the saint, for such they had been judged, regardless of the manner in which they had been found.

Francis stammered his thanks. The Pontiff gazed again at the colorful blaze of his illuminated diagram. "Whatever it means," he breathed once more, "this bit of learning, though dead, will live again." He smiled up at the monk and winked. "And we shall guard it till that day."

For the first time, the little monk noticed that the Pope had a hole in his robe. His clothing, in fact, was threadbare. The carpet in the audience room was worn through in spots, and plaster was falling from the ceiling.

But there were books on the shelves along the walls. Books of painted beauty, speaking of incomprehensible things, copied by men whose business was not to understand but to save. And the books were waiting.

"Goodby, beloved son."

And the small keeper of the flame of knowledge trudged back toward his abbey on foot. His heart was singing as he approached the robber's outpost. And if the robber happened to be taking the day off, the monk meant to sit down and wait for his return. This time he had an answer.

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Fantasy authors will keep writing stories about jinn *(usually with an attempted pun on* gin *in the title), and editors, particularly this one, will keep shaking their heads ruefully and saying, "Fine; but F. Anstey did it once and for all in* THE BRASS BOTTLE." *I think, however, that Maurice Procter has achieved a new contribution to the topic of* jinn. *Mr. Procter is that great rarity: a mystery novelist who has also been a professional policeman; and in this delightful and friendly story (conceived, in the days when he was pounding a beat, as a wish-fulfilling dream of what should happen to inspectors), he makes the Arabian demon freshly believable by setting him in the matter-of-fact world of the police station, observed as only an ex-policeman could know it.*

No Place for Magic

by MAURICE PROCTER

STUDENTS OF ENCHANTMENT WILL be interested to learn that as recently as this year the Lamp was located in the British Isles, in the industrial town of Utterborough, England.

The circumstances of its appearance were not auspicious. The English are temperamentally opposed to any sort of enchantment, and their industrial regimen is quite destructive to it. The Lamp was in serious danger until it was rescued by a police constable and eventually restored to its custodian.

The invaluable object had been thrown away by a young woman when she was sorting the property of a recently deceased maiden lady, whose only heir she was. For many years the lady had lived in comfort, apparently with no income at all, in a flat above some offices in King Street, Utterborough. She left no money, but the furnishings of her flat were priceless. Her disappointed niece, an uncultured person, thought that they were too old-fashioned to be of any value. She hastily packed the articles that seemed to be salable and sent them to an auctioneer, and threw the remainder into the back yard. The Lamp lay on a pile of rubbish in a bin without a lid. But for the action of P. C. Wade it would certainly have been

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collected by the dustmen, to be pressed and melted as scrap brass.

Wade was on night duty, examining lock-up property around King Street, when he found the Lamp. The electric beam of his own Wootton Lantern seemed to linger upon it. He picked it up and observed its arabesque design. Like the girl who had discarded it, he thought that it was "old-fashioned." But, though he was what is called an uneducated man, he was endowed with natural good taste and he rather liked the look of it.

He began to clean the Lamp with a sheet of newspaper. He held the paper crushed in his hand, and the tip of one of his fingers rubbed against the metal. There was the usual swirl of aromatic dust, and the Slave of the Lamp materialized. He greeted his new Master with a deep salaam.

Since the Slave is ten feet tall by English measurement, and powerfully built, there can be no doubt that the policeman received a shock. It is reported that he ran backwards for quite several paces, and that the way in which his baton appeared in his hand was itself almost magical. Of course the Slave bade him fear not his faithful servant.

Occult sources from which this account is largely obtained state that when Wade had recovered his poise he thought — since it was the only non-magical conclusion possible — that he was momentarily sleeping and dreaming while habit and necessity kept him balanced on his feet.

"I'm surprised at you, George," he heard himself saying with mock severity. "Going about in bathing drawers with a towel round your head. You're improperly dressed. Go and get some clothes on."

"I hear and obey," said the Slave. He vanished, and Wade supposed that he was now fully awake. "Coo," he breathed. "That *was* a nightmare."

Then he remembered a story that he had seen in pantomime at a theater, and he perceived that the object in his hand was indeed an ancient lamp. He shivered suddenly as he felt that cold unearthly wind which all true magicians know. He rubbed the Lamp cautiously, and the Slave reappeared, splendidly attired in the full uniform of a chief constable.

"Here," Wade said nervously, as he began to realize what an extraordinary thing was happening to him, "you can't wear that uniform. It's an offense. You'll get locked up."

"The Master is displeased?" asked the Slave in his deep voice.

"Er, not exactly. But I'd rather you went and changed into plain clothes. A decent suit and a trilby hat, like."

The Slave became a whirling dust-devil; then he reappeared in the required dress.

"That's right," said the constable

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approvingly. "My word, you're a smart figure of a man."

"The Master is pleased," said the genie with satisfaction. "What is his further wish? Doth he desire a guarded palace and a harem such as the caliphs only dreamed about? With many musicians and dancing girls, and much fruit and wine?"

Wade was considering this traditional offer when he heard the impatient tapping of Inspector Hostler's stick out in King Street. He looked at his watch and realized that he ought to have made his point five minutes ago. He made a certain wish concerning the inspector, but he remembered, just in time, not to utter it. The tapping came nearer. Wade peeped round the corner of the yard and saw Hostler standing in the light of a street lamp at the entrance.

"I wish Inspector Hostler was up at the Cattle Market, tapping his stick for somebody else," he said carefully. The Slave vanished, and so did Hostler.

Wade put the Lamp in his tunic pocket and wandered round his beat, smoking his pipe and meditating upon the things that are not dreamed of in man's philosophy. He realized that he would have to be careful how he spoke in the presence of the genie. A few minutes ago he had nearly dispatched the inspector to hell, and Hostler was a decent man with a wife and three children. Then again, he saw the need to be explicit. The creature did not seem to know his business with regard to the police. It was tactless of him to show up in a chief's uniform like that. He would have been in serious trouble if Hostler had seen him.

Then there was the offer of a palace and dancing girls. That was impossible. Where could it be built? Every square inch of England was owned by somebody. There would be some awkward business about trespass and ground rent, and a Ministry investigation to find out where all the building material had come from, and sightseers and newspaper photographers. Somebody would peep inside and see the girls in their muslin pants, and then it would be raided as a disorderly house. Mrs. Wade might find out about it, and that would be terribly awkward.

The constable's thoughts turned — as they often did — to the question of his own promotion, which he considered to be overdue. He doubted if the genie could help him with that, because it would have to be decided by the chief constable and the Watch Committee. Still, there was no harm in asking. He looked up and down the street, then went into the opening between the Midland Bank and the Prudential Chambers. He rubbed the Lamp, and the Slave appeared.

"George," said Wade, "can you alter people's minds?"

"I have no control over the souls of men, O Master," was the reply.

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"I didn't think you would have. Thanks, I just wanted to know."

The inspector's stick sounded again. Wade nearly said: "Blast the man."

"Take Inspector Holster to the Cattle Market again, if you please, and come back here," he said.

"I hear and obey," answered the Slave. He vanished, and returned.

"I could do with some money," said the P.C. "Go and put a hundred one-pound notes into the pocket of my best greatcoat. It's in a wardrobe in the front bedroom of my house. And mind you don't waken the wife. She'd die of fright if she saw you."

The rest of the night's tour of duty was uneventful. Wade was not an imaginative or demanding person, and he did not touch the Lamp again. He was only visited once by his sergeant, and once by Inspector Hostler, who seemed annoyed and upset about something.

When he went home in the morning he stood on a stool in the scullery and put the Lamp on the highest shelf, among his paintbrushes and tins of patent fertilizer. Upstairs, he felt in his greatcoat pocket to make sure of the money, and went to bed.

He awoke at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. When he was dressed he went down into the living-room, where his wife and his dinner awaited him.

Mrs. Wade was buxom and thoroughly domesticated. "Eeh," she said, "I've had a funny feeling all morning. As if there were somebody else in the house besides you."

"Johnny's at school, isn't he?" Wade inquired.

"Course he's at school."

"Well, then," said Wade.

"I know," she replied. "But it's a funny feeling."

He wondered if the Slave remained near the Lamp, invisible, when he was not wanted. He would be able to watch everything. It was an embarrassing thought. "I'll have to stop that caper," he decided.

After dinner he went into the garden, where he sat on an old chair in the sunshine, smoking and pondering. The Lamp was a handy thing, he concluded, but the possession of it had certain disadvantages. For instance, he dared not take his wife into his confidence. She would pester him until he summoned the genie for her to see, and when he appeared she would scream the house down. Her distrust in the creature would be unshakable, and she would be unhappy about every one of the benefits that he brought. It was awkward, very awkward. Wade put aside a dream of a handsome new car, because his wife knew that he could not afford any sort of car.

At that moment a car did stop at his gate, and his wife called out to him: "C.I.D."

It was Detective-Sergeant Brown from headquarters.

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"We thought we'd let you have your sleep out," he said with a smile. "There was a break-in on your beat last night. The Midland Bank. Did you notice anything unusual?"

Wade immediately thought about the genie. His dismay must have shown in his face, but Brown expected that. Any policeman is dismayed when he has failed to find a break-in.

"Don't you worry," the detective said. "There are no marks which you should have noticed. We think it's a duplicate-key job, and we're interrogating the staff. It's the rummest job you ever saw. The strong-room left wide open, but only a hundred quid missing. Somebody must have disturbed the thieves. Inspector Hostler perhaps. He says he had a feeling there was something queer going on around there last night."

"I'm sorry," said Wade. "I saw nothing. I can't help you at all."

Brown went away. Wade waited until his wife was upstairs, then he went into the scullery and rubbed the Lamp. The genie appeared, almost filling the tiny room.

"You stole that hundred pounds." Wade accused.

"The Master required it," the Slave answered simply. "Gold and jewels can be conjured, but not the wealth that is made of paper. Such paper is but a token of riches, but each piece hath a number. If your Slave made it, it would not be even a token." He sighed unhappily.

"I see your point," said the policeman. "But you mustn't steal. You'd better nip back to the Midland Bank and push those tokens through the letter box."

"I hear and obey," said the Slave, fading rapidly.

Wade went upstairs. The money was no longer in the wardrobe. He sighed with relief.

That incident was not without good results. It gave the constable an idea. He decided that he would have a super-policeman to keep his beat clear of crime. He took the Lamp on duty with him that night, and when he had turned out on his beat he called the Slave and gave him his instructions.

"George," he said. "I want you to float around my beat all the time I'm on duty. I'll contact you regularly. You can report to me everything that happens, but I don't want you to interfere in anything unless I seem to be in difficulties. Is that clear?"

"It is clear, O Master," the genie replied.

Master and Slave worked together for the remainder of that fortnight's spell of night duty. Wade was lucky — normally he would have thought he was unlucky — in having a case of shopbreaking on his beat. The vigilant genie called him to the shop just as three men were escaping with hundreds of pairs of nylon stockings. The men dropped their parcels and at-

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tacked Wade. He overpowered one of them without much trouble, and the other two never knew what had hit them. He was complimented by the bench, and his name appeared in the newspapers under such headlines as: LONE P.C. KNOCKS OUT THREE.

During those nine or ten nights he also had several less important captures, due to the genie's assistance. He arrested a man who had broken a plate-glass window in drunken exuberance, and he caught a man driving away a motor car without the owner's permission. Also, he reported the licensee of the Fighting Cocks Inn for supplying intoxicating liquor during non-permitted hours, and sundry customers for consuming the liquor. The licensee still believes that there was a spy among the customers, because *somebody* must have unbarred the door for the police to enter.

The Slave quickly acquired a basic knowledge of police work, and he increased it by reading over Wade's shoulder as he wrote his reports. There is proof that he was susceptible to environment, because one night at the end of those two weeks he completely changed his form of address. He appeared before Wade and saluted in the correct military manner, and said: "Sir, I beg to report that there is a blue Morris saloon, CYK 3979, proceeding towards us from the direction of Sisters Road. There appears to be an offense of failing to display two obligatory white lights to the front, under the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations, 1936, Section One."

"Now, that's a lot better than bowing and scraping, George," replied Wade with approval. "But we won't bother with the car. Is there aught else?"

"There is the man James Smith, alias Jimmy the Jumper, loitering in the alley behind the Jubilee Wine Stores. He appears to be considering the possibility of climbing to an upper window."

"Good work, old boy," said the policeman. "We'll go and investigate."

It will be seen that the genie, though intelligent, had certain deficiencies. He could not tell the difference between a minor offense and a serious crime. Until he had listened to the court proceedings a few times, he seemed to think that all offenders, from highway robbers to keepers of dogs without licenses, were summarily strangled by bowstring and thrown into the Utter. Nevertheless, he was invaluable to Wade. The policeman even used him on day duty, though he had to be very careful about his appearances. A few people saw him, looked again and saw nobody, and believed that they had been mistaken.

When Wade had been using the genie as an auxiliary policeman for two months there was a Watch Committee meeting at which sev-

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eral promotions were to be made. There were many eligible officers, and Wade was not among those chosen. But someone mentioned his name, and soon it was on every committeeman's lips. After much discussion his name was put on the list and he was promoted.

As a sergeant Wade had half the town to patrol, and with the Slave's help he could have made many arrests. But he was discreet enough to put many of his cases into the hands of keen young constables. At that time, too, he employed the genie at home. In a piecemeal and unobtrusive way he had curtains and carpets renewed, and furniture repolished. His wife thought that the gloss on the furniture was the result of her chronic efforts with beeswax and a cloth.

With the magic of the Lamp Wade could perhaps have heaped benefits upon mankind. But he lacked imagination, and though he was not unduly selfish his outlook was limited by years of police routine. So he confined his kindnesses to people with whom he came in contact. Poor people, elderly people, needy widows, and mothers of large families discovered stocks of food or small amounts of silver money which they thought they must have overlooked. At no cost to himself, he enjoyed the satisfaction of giving.

Wade's personal demands remained moderate. When he needed tobacco or money — never more than a handful of silver — he summoned the Slave and asked for it. The latter, under the iron — or rather brass — discipline of the Lamp's enchantment, made no protest about having to materialize for such trivial reasons, though he did once shed angry tears when he was called upon to supply a box of matches in the middle of the night. It must be remembered that he was a jinni, a devil. He constantly hoped that Wade would ask him to produce a lovely troublesome houri, or order the violent death of an enemy, and Wade constantly disappointed him. When he wept, the policeman thought that he was tired because he had been handling boxes of groceries all day, so he gave him a two day leave.

About a week later, at 5:45 one sunny morning, there occurred one of those incidents which can happen to policeman at any time. A man entered Utterborough Police Headquarters and complained that he had lost a wallet containing twenty pounds while he was rushing to the station to catch the first train. He had seen nobody except a few policemen, and he remarked, rather apologetically, that he felt sure one of the policemen must have picked up the wallet.

Wade was alone in the sergeants' office at the time, making up the following nights' postings, and through the letter-hatch to the inspectors' office he heard Hostler receive the complaint. The worthy inspector was extremely proud and

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jealous of the force's reputation, and he was infuriated by the mere suggestion that a policeman might dishonestly keep the wallet.

"When the men come in at 6 o'clock," he boomed, "we'll ask every one of them, including myself, to submit to a search. I hope that will satisfy you."

Wade immediately thought of the Lamp in his pocket. He could not put it in his drawer because that would be searched too. If Hostler found the Lamp he would rub it to see what it was made of. He would see the genie and make shrewd guesses about Wade's smart captures, his own transportation to the Cattle Market, everything. That would be awful. In a panic, Wade looked around for a place to hide the Lamp. But the little office was too tidy. A police station has no place for magic.

At any moment, he knew, the inspector might come striding indignantly into the room. He took the Lamp from his pocket and summoned the Slave.

"Here," he whispered urgently. "Take this and hide it somewhere."

The Slave took the Lamp in his hands and smiled enigmatically.

"Go on," whispered Wade in a fright. "Fade!" And the genie faded.

It was a pity really, because it was afterwards discovered that the complaining civilian had left his wallet at home. Not until the search was over did Wade realize that he would never see the Lamp again. He went into a quiet corner of the police-station yard and called for the genie as loudly as he dared. For answer, he heard a sound that began like a chuckle and ended like a roll of thunder in the clear morning sky. He was afraid to call again. He went away, trying to convince himself that he would be better without the Lamp. He had always been rather uncomfortable about it, he remembered. There was no place for magic in his world.

Note:

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The Last Word

by CHAD OLIVER AND CHARLES BEAUMONT

CLAUDE ADAMS STOOD IN THE COLlapsed ruins of the city and sifted sand through his fingers, noting with approval that his hands were steady. He cocked his head and listened.

There was nothing.

A sluggish breeze pushed sand through the piles of junk that had once housed a mighty civilization.

Claude called out; he called not in desperation but with a scientific aloofness that he found singularly admirable, under the circumstances. "Hello! Can anyone hear me? Am I alone?"

There was only the wind, and the sand.

"I *am* alone," Claude concluded, not displeased. "Well."

He had known it for some little time now. He, Claude Adams, was the Last Man in the World. He thought of it in appropriate capitals, and the symbolism appealed to him.

He walked over to the machine he had built and regarded it with a critical eye. A bit sloppy about the edges, he would have to admit that. A trifle foggy about the dials, perhaps. Still, a not unworthy piece of construction.

He would have to use it; his inflexible logic told him that much.

It was not, of course, that he was fond of crowds, or anything of that sort. Actually, he had always tended toward a rather solitary type of existence. However, he was a believer in moderation. It was good to be thrown on one's own resources and all that, but there were limits.

He frowned at his machine.

The problem was easily stated: he was the Last Man in the World, alone in a desert of sand, shrubs, and ruins. He was, so to speak, at the end of time's tether. To resolve this dilemma, he would have to step into his machine and travel backward through time until he found somebody.

Not just *anybody*, of course.

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But somebody.

"He who hesitates," Claude observed, "is lost."

He squared his shoulders and climbed into his rectangular machine. His sensitive fingers set the dials. He seated himself and took out a pocket edition of Shoogly's *Advanced Theoretical Physics*, with which he hoped to amuse himself en route through time.

He waved farewell.

He pushed the red button.

The machine stopped.

Claude put down the book, stood up, and yawned. He glanced at the temporal indicator, wondering when he was.

"Two million B.C.," he read.

He did not panic. He sat down, filled his pipe, and lit it. He smoked until he was quite calm.

"Shoddy postwar materials," Claude said. "Must have overshot the mark."

He activated the portal and stepped outside. A warm sun and soft, pleasant breezes greeted him. He stood in an immense green field, dotted with flowers. He took a deep breath and smiled.

"A lot of years," he mused. He tapped his pipe on his boot. "I am now, beyond a doubt, the First Man in the World."

He sat in the fragrant grass and stretched. How did one go about being the First Man in the World? He was not altogether sure. The symbolism of the moment did not escape him. Still, apart from skipping about in the sunbeams and feeling significant, what was there for him to *do?*

His reverie was disturbed by a rasping clank from the other side of his machine. Claude stood up with unaccustomed alacrity.

"Good heavens," he said.

A being confronted him. Piteously, it clasped its hands together in supplication. It moved again, its gears grinding horribly.

Claude examined the object with interest. It was humanoid in appearance.

"I am still the First Man in the World," he said.

The clanking humanoid was indubitably intended to be female. She was pitiably rusted and several of her plates were sprung. Her skin hung slackly on her metallic frame. Her eyes were dull and her hair a matted disaster.

"Robot?" he wondered. "Or android? Clearly, it has a mechanical basis, but it faintly resembles a woman."

The thing creaked to her feet. "Brrrkl?" she wheezed.

Claude did not permit himself to be trapped by emotionalism. He rapped the creature smartly on the forehead and analyzed the hollow *bong* which followed.

"Oil," he said, snapping his fingers.

He stepped into his time machine and produced a tube of oil from the supply closet. He had intended it

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for his own machine, but then oil was oil, he reasoned, and he could not abandon a lady in distress.

Besides, his curiosity was piqued.

Maintaining an air of clinical detachment, he located a small hole in the back of her neck, hidden by her stringy hair. While she whimpered gratefully, he squeezed a generous portion of oil into her interior.

The result was instantaneous.

The thing drew herself up with some grace and became a woman. She smiled and produced a comb, running it through her tangled hair. Her skin tautened on its frame and her eyes sparkled.

"Brrrkl," she purred, trying to snuggle against him.

He pushed her away. "The transformation is not yet complete," he said judiciously, eying her with some distaste. "Try to control yourself, my dear."

She seemed disappointed, but rallied quickly. She pointed to the west, jumped up and down eagerly on her newly oiled limbs, and gestured for him to accompany her.

"What next?" Claude asked of the sunshine and the silence.

He followed her gamboling form across the grasslands. He noticed that she was becoming better looking as the oil worked itself into her vitals.

"The Dawn of Man," Claude mused.

Unexpectedly, he heard music. His trained ears positively recognized the soft strains of lutes, infinitely sad, infinitely melancholy.

They topped a slight rise and there they were. Musicians, no doubt of that. But what *kind* of musicians? Ahead, in a slight clearing by the side of a still lake, was the most singular assemblage of beings he had ever seen. They lay in various supine positions in the pleasant grass, models of relaxation.

"What's this?" Claude whispered. "Who are these people?"

"Brrrkl." The android's arm moved up (still with a trace of stiffness at the shoulder joint) and a finger whirred, pointing.

Claude looked and came quite close to losing his composure. There, leaning precariously, was a ship; its naked metal was acned with great splotches of rust and decay, its glass fogged, its once bright paint faded from the sun.

The elegiac music seemed to quaver slightly: the notes trembled loose from the heart-shaped lutes and hung briefly on the air.

Claude moved toward the lissome group of musicians. Aside from flesh-tones which suggested seaweed, these people were little different from humans. They had arms and legs, in the proper number. But never had Claude seen such palpable fragility; they were like porcelain figurines.

He watched his step.

A silent voice spoke to him: "Greetings!"

Claude nodded. Telepaths, eh?

The figures did not stir, apart from the movement of their grace-

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ful fingers over the silver strings.

The voice murmured in Claude's mind. "We are from the planet which you call Mars."

The music took on a more profound mournfulness. One of the green men smiled tragically. He plucked a small flower and burst into tears. Others followed his example.

"We were exploring the solar system when our craft fell to the Earth. It was . . . terrible. Now, we are here."

Claude brightened. "Mechanical difficulties?" he said.

"Yes. We would like to go on, somehow."

Claude rubbed his hands together. "Perhaps a little old-fashioned know-how would be in order."

"It is hopeless, but you are good."

"Let's have a look-see."

Sighing, two of the Martians rose from the grassy hillock. It seemed to Claude that they were nearly transparent. They proceeded to the spaceship.

"Just let me poke around a little," Claude said, and entered.

Within, it was a maze of coils, tubes, knobs, dials, and antennae. Claude shook his head. Then he noticed something on the lowest level.

Clearly, it was a furnace.

Beside it stood a huge stack of wood.

"Ah," he said. It was the most devilishly clever device he had ever seen. The ship was operated on the absurdly simple — and therefore ingenious — principle of outer combustion, or spontaneous ignition!

The solution was at hand.

Claude left the ship, beaming. "I've got her fixed, I think," he said.

Sadly, the Martians went up the ladder. Claude took some ten-dollar credits from his wallet — useless now! — and broke up some kindling. He applied his pipe lighter to the bills. In moments there was a crackling blaze.

The ship quivered.

Claude left in a hurry and decided he had better close the airlock for them. "Impractical fools," he chuckled.

He found the increasingly female android waiting for him.

He turned back, but the ship was already off the ground.

The voice inside his brain was imperially calm. "Earthling, you have done us a service. Martians do not forget. The android is yours."

Then, in a shower of sparks and heat, the ship smoked into the sky.

The android's hand touched his.

He turned and touched her shoulders. They were surprisingly soft.

"I'll call you Eve," he said.

The symbolism did not escape him.

In the fullness of time, a child was born.

Torn between Cain and Abel, Claude Adams called the boy Son. The compromise preyed on his pre-

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cision-hungry mind, but it was the best that he could do.

The first indication they had that Son was somehow different came when the boy was three months old. He killed a rabbit by staring weakly at it with his watery eyes. This caused Claude some discomfiture, but his insatiable curiosity got the upper hand. He began to watch the boy closely.

When Son began to nurse while Eve was yet a good hundred yards away, that was good enough for Claude. Son *was* different from other children he had known.

"Psi factors," Claude said, stamping on the grass. "The mysterious chemisms of the blood. Post-atomic radiation. Exposure to the time stream. Alteration of the gene chromosomes. The boy's a mutant!"

And so he was.

Yet they had their Son, and in the main these were happy times. They had the sunlight and the green fields and the long summer days.

And the nights.

Eve was enough to drive a man mad, when properly oiled.

Still, Claude reflected, there was a price-tag on Paradise. You had to pay to play in the Garden of Eden. The halcyon years went by, and no honeymoon lasts forever.

Little things began to come between them.

Eve grew cross and irritable, and took to sleeping late in the mornings and slouching about the fields in unkempt leaves. Claude felt a growing restlessness. He took to polishing up his time machine, and would retire to its cabin for long periods, smoking his pipe and idly twiddling with the dials.

Finally, he called Son to his side.

"Running away, Pop?" Son said knowingly, lying at his ease in mid-air. "You ditching Mom?"

"In a nutshell," Claude admitted, "that's it. I'm going into the future, Son. Maybe I'll come back later. Would you like to go with me?"

Son gracefully rolled over in the air and touched his chin with his knees. "You go ahead, Pop. I'll catch up with you later."

"But you have no machine, Son."

Son smiled tolerantly. "I'll get there," he said.

"Stout lad."

Claude made his preparations with care. Exactly twelve years since he had first set foot on the grassy fields, he climbed back into his machine. His heart was somehow heavy within him.

He took the old, long-empty oil tube with him, and there was a suspicion of moisture about his eyes.

He set the dials.

He pressed the red button for the second time.

There was a sort of hiss, followed by grindings. The machine stopped.

Claude moved toward the portal. "Well," he said, "the 20th Century, if I'm not mistaken!" He glanced at the temporal indicator.

He was mistaken.

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The long red arrow trembled slightly at 3042 A.D. Claude frowned. "Damned strange," he muttered.

The machine could not be set into operation again until it had properly cooled, of course.

Claude activated the door. It wheezed pneumatically inward, colliding with a rather shapeless object in the corner that, Claude knew instantly, had not been there before.

"Eve!"

She rose stiffly from her cramped position.

"I stowed away," she said. "Was it very wrong of me, dear?"

Claude sighed. "What is wrong? What is right? Anyway, we're here."

They stepped out the cabin door.

The day was a riot of sunshine and crisp breezes. Claude sniffed and examined his surroundings.

He was in a city. Tall, lean buildings rose all around him. The buildings were girdled by insect swarms of tiny planes, and crowds of people stood on mobile sidewalks. Claude watched the people. They seemed strangely alike, as if there were only one person, reflected and reflected again, thousandly. They were, without exception, expressionless. They stared at tiny antennaed boxes which depended from their necks.

"Do you love me?" Eve asked.

"Yes and no," Claude answered, evasively, and continued at a brisker gait.

Then he stopped. At his feet was a clump of dandelions. He plucked one of the healthier specimens.

Instantly, a plane dropped from the sky and landed at his side.

The door of the plane opened. There was no one inside.

"Name?"

"Claude Adams. And yours?"

"Address?"

"At the moment, I'm afraid that I am not permanently located."

"You are under arrest. We're booking you on a 703-A."

"A 703-A?"

"That's right. A 703-A. Curiosity."

Claude was suddenly unable to control his feet. They marched him into the cabin. He sat down. The door closed. The plane lifted.

"I'll get you out!" Eve called from far below. "Don't worry. I'll talk to someone!"

Her voice faded with distance.

Tamping down a quantity of strong shag tobacco — the last of his supply — Claude stretched out on the fibrous pallet and attempted to think.

Undoubtedly this was a jail, although it did not resemble a jail. There were no bars: only a shallow moat, easily leaped, and a decided ascetic touch in the furnishings suggested the concept of imprisonment.

There was a baffled sob.

Claude turned and saw that he was not alone. A youngish man in a far corner sat disconsolately, twirling the knobs of a blank TV set.

"What's the difficulty?" Claude asked democratically.

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"The TV," the man groaned. "It doesn't work. You understand? It does not work!"

At this moment there came a hollow laugh.

From another corner an older man arose. He was bearded. "It'll never work, either," he gibbered.

The young man turned on the bearded gentleman angrily and Claude turned away, wondering. After the commotion died down he addressed himself to the bearded man.

"Tell me something about this civilization," he said. "I seem to have a touch of amnesia."

"What's to tell?" the bearded man shrugged. "When the Overmasters arrived fifty years ago, from Mars, they eliminated all war, suffering, crime, disease, and work. It seems that this was in payment for a favor an Earthman once did them. Since then we've lived off the fat of the land. The Big Machine runs the show —"

"The Big Machine?"

"A Highly Complex Mechanism," the bearded man said, warming to his topic. "Cybernetics and all that. It has taped the neural indices of every human being on Earth — it can steam your brains out if you step out of line. Not only that, but it serves as the electronic matrix of every structure on the planet. Without The Big Machine, friend, there wouldn't be a manufactured molecule around here big enough to spit on."

"Hmmm," said Claude.

He continued to think.

Eve came to him the following day. He spotted her moving slowly across the smooth green lawn.

"Eve!"

She stopped at the water and did not look up.

Claude rushed to the edge of the moat. "Eve," he cried. "What news?

"I got through," Eve said. "I spoke to it. The Big Machine."

"Ah! It's here, in this very city?"

"Yes."

"Well, then. I am going to be released immediately?"

Eve toed at a daisy. She seemed to blush. "No," she murmured. "It has extended your sentence to ninety years."

Claude reeled. "You're angry," he groped. "I left you and this is your revenge —"

"No." Eve raised her head. Of her two prime expressions, she did not use joy. "You must try to understand, Claude. I went to The Big Machine. My intentions were excellent. Then . . . something happened. Chemical affinities, meshing circuits — oh, I don't know!"

"Meshing circuits?"

Eve smiled, remembering. "I am mechanical," she said slowly. "The Big Machine is mechanical. It was one of those things. He's been lonely, Claude."

"That's enough. Do not go on."

Claude leaped the moat. He grasped Eve's shoulders. "Where is

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he?" he rasped. "Come on, I know he's around here somewhere."

"There. The domed building on the corner. Oh, Claude —"

Claude moved fast. His blood was up now. The Big Machine, since it had the neural indices of every person on Earth, had no need of guards. Claude entered the Central Rotunda without difficulty.

The Big Machine, resembling an immense dynamo, hummed.

"Machine," Claude murmured, "say your prayers."

Claude inspected the machine. It was forged of heavy materials. It appeared to be impenetrable. It hummed and banks of lights flickered in its cavernous recesses.

Somewhere, it must have an Achilles' Heel.

Claude applied his scientific know-how to the problem and got nowhere. He kicked The Big Machine with something akin to desperation.

Then he noticed something odd floating directly above his head.

It was Son.

"The plug, Dad," Son said.

"Beg pardon?"

"The plug. Pull the plug!"

"Of course!"

The Big Machine sent up Sonic Vibrations. It hummed and quivered as Claude approached the socket. It knew Fear.

"Damned clever," Claude said, and yanked the plug out.

"Umph!" cried Son. "Hang on, Pop!"

The world began to lose its bearings. Things effervesced. Claude swayed and was hit by attacks of nausea.

Buildings crumbled, their electronic matrix destroyed.

People dropped in their tracks, their neural indices triggered.

Claude felt himself falling. . . .

There was darkness.

He awoke to find himself in the collapsed ruins of the city. A sluggish breeze pushed sand through the piles of junk that had once housed a mighty civilization.

There was silence everywhere.

Son flew over astride a large boulder and ground to a stop at his father's side. "Mom is here," he said. "She wants you, Dad."

Side by side, they walked into a clearing, surrounded by scorched foliage. Eve sat silently on a block of broken masonry. Her face was moist with tears.

Claude took her hand.

"Eve," he said. "You and I and Son are now civilization. Do you understand what this means?"

"Yes."

"And are you afraid?"

"A little. It isn't easy to be the mother of a whole new race."

"No," Claude conceded, "not easy. The job is too big for the two of us. We must have a wife for Son. We must have a female child."

Son smiled.

Claude squared his shoulders.

Together, he and Eve marched into the bushes.

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